THE GENTLEMEN'S CODE:
A STUDENT-ADULT COLLABORATION ON CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE BEHAVIORAL NORMS

by
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Abstract

At North Middle School—a Northeastern public school with a large African immigrant population—Black males were overrepresented in disciplinary referral by a factor of three in 2017-2018. A literature review framed by network theory (Neal, J. W. & Neal, 2013) and the concept of the serial stream of discipline (Irvin, Tobin, Sprague, Sugai, & Vincent, 2004) produced a conceptual framework of potential causes and factors related to this disparity. In semi-structured interviews, key informants hypothesized that bias and cultural difference might lead adults to overselect Black males for disciplinary referral. They also expressed interest in engaging the Gentlemen—a support and affinity group for North boys of color—and their families in an intervention. A student-adult collaboration took place across the fall trimester of 2019-2020, resulting in a Gentlemen's Code—a statement of behavioral norms that the Gentlemen believed appropriate to their group. It was hypothesized that this Code might mitigate the roles of bias and cultural difference on disciplinary selection by improving perceptions and self-perceptions about the Gentlemen and by advancing a more culturally responsive version of behavioral expectations. The Code was publicized via multiple pathways throughout the winter trimester in an attempt to encourage its integration into the daily affairs of the school. A mixed methods evaluation drew on data from preintervention and postintervention perceptual surveys, stakeholder interviews and focus groups, North's discipline database, and participant observer field notes. The intervention did not unfold exactly as envisioned. Family involvement was limited, and the Gentlemen's Code arguably did not become a pervasive reference point for Gentlemen or teachers. The Gentlemen expressed pride in and ownership of the Code, however, and the ways in which the Code was used outside of implementation and evaluation activities appeared positive and helpful. Disciplinary referrals for Gentlemen decreased from comparison

trimesters but not at a significant level. However, there were other signs of shift, including increasingly nuanced faculty and staff understandings of the group.

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Executive Summary

At North Middle School—a Northeastern public school—race/ethnicity, gender, and free and reduced lunch program participation predicted rates of disciplinary referral in the 2017-2018 school year. Discipline disparities reached alarming significance for Black males, who—at North—were largely first and second generation African immigrants. These students made up 13% of the student body in 2017-2018 but 39% of those students referred for discipline. This raises concerns about equitable treatment, equitable access to education, and equitable educational outcomes (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Losen & Gillespie, 2012; Noguera, 2003). Similar disparities have been documented nationally (Anyon et al., 2014; McFadden, Marsh, Price, & Hwang, 1992; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002; Skiba et al., 2011), and the federal government has exhorted state and local education agencies to prioritize remediation (U.S. Department of Education & U.S. Department of Justice, 2014). The Trump administration subsequently rescinded that guidance (U.S. Department of Education & U.S Department of Justice, 2018), but lessons learned from this research study may have relevance to other schools and educational agencies still committed to that work. This study may also add to understanding of how discipline disparities impacting Black Americans might also impact African immigrants.

A literature review framed by network theory (Neal, J. W. & Neal, 2013) and the concept of the serial stream of discipline (Irvin, Tobin, Sprague, Sugai, & Vincent, 2004) produced a conceptual framework of potential causes and factors related to the overrepresentation of Black males in school discipline at North. This framework enhanced and clarified Gregory et al.'s (2010) often cited conceptualization of causes and factors related to the problem. A subsequent qualitative needs assessment study used semi-structured interviews of key informants to narrow the focus of the study to a portion of the conceptual framework that Black male students and

faculty leaders alike seemed attuned to and primed to intervene in. The results suggested support for an intervention that would mitigate how bias and cultural difference influence which behavioral incidents adults select for disciplinary referral. The results further suggested support for elevating the voices of the Gentlemen—a support and affinity group for North boys of color—and their families in the intervention process.

A synthesis of relevant intervention literature found that models for effective classroom management often ignore issues of cultural diversity, and that the literature on multicultural education often ignores classroom management (Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, & Curran, 2004). One of the clearest attempts to bridge that divide, culturally responsive classroom management (Weinstein, Curran, & Tomlinson-Clarke, 2003), remains largely theoretical and under-operationalized (Patish, 2016). In contrast, another framework for school behavior management, positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) has been intensively researched and operationalized (Sugai & Horner, 2009). Some have called for wider stakeholder involvement and greater incorporation of culturally relevant practices in PBIS (Baker & Ryan, 2014; Lustick, 2017; McIntosh, K., Girvan, Horner, & Smolkowski, 2014). However, evidence-based guidance for how that might work remains scarce. The present study attempted to fill these gaps by designing and evaluating an intervention in which the Gentlemen would engage with adult allies to develop a behavioral code distinct from existing schoolwide expectations. The theory of treatment was that this might mitigate the effects of cultural difference on disciplinary selection by advancing a more culturally responsive version of behavioral expectations and might mitigate the role of bias by improving perceptions of the Gentlemen and the Gentlemen's perceptions of themselves.

Across the fall trimester of 2019-2020, families and community allies—including recent

alumni of the Gentlemen—supported the Gentlemen in a multi-step process of drafting a Gentlemen's Code. The Code was publicized via multiple pathways throughout the winter trimester in an attempt to encourage its integration into the daily affairs of the school. A mixed methods design for both process and outcome evaluation drew on data from preintervention and postintervention perceptual surveys, stakeholder group interviews, a focus group, North's disciplinary records, and participant observer field notes. Cummins' (2001) framework for the empowerment of minority students and Mitra's (2003, 2009) conditions for successful student-adult collaborations provided frames for interpreting qualitative data.

Multiple stakeholders were study participants, including 69% of North's faculty and staff, 30% of Gentlemen, 5% of Gentlemen families, and several other community members. Additionally, most Gentlemen were actively involved in the intervention even if they did not provide parental permission and student assent to participate in data collection for this study. Family involvement was less than anticipated. Using Mitra's (2003, 2009) three pathways for meaningful student participation and seven conditions for success in student-adult collaborations as a framework for analysis, I found that participants highlighted three particularly useful qualities of the collaboration: (a) the process treated students as experts and interpreters, (b) activities were structured around equitable student-adult relationships in which power was shared, and (c) the Gentlemen were able to have fun in the activities. Cummins' (2001) framework for the empowerment of minority students helped frame analysis of how well the intervention empowered the Gentlemen. The intervention design privileged the voices of minority and multilingual students and—despite limited participation—their families. Although participants did not explicitly say that they were drawing on their cultural and linguistic backgrounds during any of the drafting activities, several participants saw resonance between the

Code and their cultural and religious traditions. At the same time, some adult participants worried that the Code reflected what the Gentlemen thought White teachers wanted to hear and that White teachers would use it as a tool for controlling the Gentlemen. Many participants, adult and youth, also advocated that the Code should be seen as aspirational and used to remind instead of as a pretext for punishment.

One anticipated outcome for the intervention was that the Gentlemen's Code would be more culturally relevant than existing schoolwide expectations. Some participants articulated connections between the code and their own cultural background; others described it as as explicitly relevant to being *a Gentleman*—as emblematic of the culture that they had developed as a group over the course of four years. They expressed no quarrel with published schoolwide expectations, but they felt more pride in and connection to the Gentlemen's Code because it was *theirs*. Another anticipated outcome for the intervention was that the Gentlemen's Code would become a part of everyday life at North, at least for the Gentlemen and the adults who worked with them. In practice, though, references to the Code outside of intervention activities were sporadic. Approximately a third of teachers ultimately posted the Code in their classrooms, but participants did not report frequent references to the code in milieu.

Gentlemen self-perceptions remained wholly positive across the study period. Faculty and staff perceptions of the Gentlemen remained mixed but demonstrated some possible shifts in understanding of the value of the group. No intervention effects were detected on the number of referrals received by Gentlemen. Nor was there any indication of a closing of discipline gaps as a result of the intervention.

Chapter 1

Nature and Causes of Discipline Disparities

In June 2018, 23 boys from North Middle School[1] convened a summit at a local university to discuss the state and future of the Gentlemen. North's school social worker had formed the group two years earlier to mitigate the impacts of implicit and structural bias. Most Gentlemen are first or second generation African immigrants, but the group includes boys with Southeast Asian, Middle Eastern, and Central American immigrant backgrounds and a few White, Black American, and multi-racial students. By the time of the June 2018 summit, the Gentlemen had developed into a thriving, if controversial, affinity and mutual support group with traditions including weekly lunches, weekly basketball games, afterschool homework time, a loose protocol for helping each other resolve conflict with peers and adults, and a sendoff ritual for students moving to other schools. A new group, the Fierce Girls, was also just forming for girls of color.

At their summit, the Gentlemen catalogued their emerging traditions and described what the group meant to them. They shared messages of familiality, mutual support, empathy, and hard work. Students expressed pride in being Gentlemen and a desire to raise awareness about the group. When asked what they wanted people to know about the Gentlemen, their answers were poignant.

"We're not just troublemakers who play basketball."

"We get rewarded for hard work."

"This group helps decrease the rate of getting in trouble."

"We are always spectating each other and helping each other do the right thing."

[1] North Middle School is a pseudonym.

"We are family, and we protect each other."

"We might get in trouble sometimes, but we make a difference. We help each other to improve academically."

"We are not barbarians; we're a respectful part of the community."

"We might look like we do certain things, but we are always trying while dealing with struggles in and out of school."

"If we do something wrong, we're just learning. We're trying to be gentlemen."

Although engaged and insightful, the Gentlemen also exhibited what seemed to me, their assistant principal, to be problematic behaviors. Some threw chalk at each other and grappled over snacks. Some ignored and spoke over each other, called each other stupid, and complained that the summit was boring. One student had to be driven back to school early because he was swearing at the social worker and roaming the university building. When the remainder returned to school, five refused to go to their next class because they wanted to go play basketball instead. The next day, a few reflected that these behaviors contradicted the kind of reputation they wanted the Gentlemen to have.

Facilitation style may have led to some of the behaviors. The social worker is not trained as a classroom teacher and intentionally avoids a power-over stance with students. At the same time, I had to question myself. Were the Gentlemen behaving like any other cohort of North Middle School students would in a similar situation? If yes, was I interpreting their behavior in a biased manner? If no, what was behind the difference? These questions point to one of the key reasons the school social worker founded the Gentlemen: persistent disparities in discipline frequency and severity between racial, socioeconomic, and gender groups. Such disparities are evident at North and at schools across the United States. They are alarming and concerning.

Consider the following statistics from other contexts around the country. Black students have been found two to four times as likely as White students to receive disciplinary referrals, boys 1.6 to three times as likely as girls, and free lunch recipients 1.4 times as likely as full-pay students (Anyon et al., 2014; Burke & Nishioka, 2014; McFadden, Marsh, Price, & Hwang, 1992; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002; Skiba et al., 2011). English Language Learners (ELLs) have been found up to twice as likely to be suspended as monolingual English speakers (Burke, 2015; Losen, 2015). Black students have been found between two and four times as likely as White students to be suspended, and Black boys ten times as likely as White girls (Burke & Nishioka, 2014; Losen & Gillespie, 2012; Office for Civil Rights, 2018; Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008).

Demographic disparities in discipline come at a cost. Disciplinary referrals typically involve an interruption of the learning process, whether because of the behavior itself or because of the adult intervention. This interruption compounds when it leads to removal from the learning environment for a visit to an administrator's office or for a suspension. That such impacts are distributed in a demographically disparate way raises concerns about equitable opportunity to learn (Gee, 2008; Skiba et al., 2011). After all, "one of the most consistent findings of modern education research is the strong positive relationship between time engaged in academic learning and student achievement" (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010, p. 60). Indeed, one-fifth of academic achievement differences between Black and White students have been attributed to differential suspension rates (Morris & Perry, 2016). The costs are lifelong as well. In a study of 182,000 Florida students, 49% of those entering high school with three or more suspensions did not graduate (Balfanz, Byrnes, & Fox, 2014). Even more ominously, the demographics of school discipline closely mirror and presage those of imprisonment, leading

some to posit a structural school-to-prison pipeline (Noguera, 2003; Wald & Losen, 2003). If human costs do not suffice to sound an alarm for some, Marchbanks III et al. (2015) estimate nearly a billion dollars in taxpayer outlays each year due to students dropping out or repeating grades because of suspensions.

With all of this in mind, President Obama's Departments of Justice and Education issued joint guidance in 2014 exhorting state and local educational agencies to monitor and take comprehensive measures to reduce discipline gaps (U.S. Department of Education & U.S. Department of Justice, 2014). Four years later, the Trump administration rescinded that guidance, arguing that the guidance was reducing school safety by discouraging educators from holding students of color accountable for their actions (U.S. Department of Education & U.S Department of Justice, 2018a, 2018b). This sparked controversy and highlights that the issue of discipline disparities is charged along ideological lines (Ujifusa, 2018). The present research study aligns with the Obama era directive and agrees with the Center for Civil Rights Remedies that "We can and must do better for young people whose future is at stake" (Losen & Gillespie, 2012, p. 4). In particular, it attempts to do better within the unique context of North Middle School, which serves grades six through eight in a small Northeastern city.

North is part of its state's largest and most diverse district. Its racial and ethnic diversity stands out in a state with one of the highest proportions of White residents in the nation (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Its attendance area spans from a densely developed city center to an outer neighborhood of suburban cul-de-sacs. Dispersed throughout are a handful of public and low-cost rental developments where many of North's families of color live. In the 2017-2018 school year, 54% of North Middle School students received free or reduced price lunch, 45% were of color, and 34% lived in a household with a primary language other than English, with at least 30

languages present—ratios that remained stable throughout the duration of this study despite incremental increases in the total student population.

Of particular note is the fact that students of color in North's district are largely multilingual and of recent immigrant, refugee, or asylum-seeking backgrounds from throughout Africa, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and Central America. Catholic Charities has worked for several decades to resettle refugees and asylum seekers from around the world to the locale (LearningWorks, Institute for Civic Leadership, & Wessler, 2013; Sun & Cadge, 2013; Valenzuela, 2015). Nearly 50 flags hang in the North cafeteria, representing the birth countries of its students from 2016 to 2020. North's district utilizes U.S. Census categories for guardian-reported race and ethnicity, conjoining all Black students, recent immigrant or not, under the term *Black and African American*. Throughout this research study, the term *Black* is used to connote the same conjunction except when directly quoting authors or participants who use other nomenclature. When required for clarity, the terms *African immigrant* and *Black American* are used to distinguish between students whose families immigrated to the United States within living memory and those who have ancestors who were brought to this continent as slaves.

In 2017-2018, only 18 of the 129 Black students at North lived in households that reported English as the primary language. That, however, seems not to have exempted Black students at North from the disparate disciplinary outcomes experienced by Black students nationally, and this study finds that much of the research and theory about these disparities is directly relevant to all Black students at North, whether Black American or African immigrant. Therefore, this study frames its problem of practice as relating to Black students in general, reminding the reader throughout that the majority of Black students at North are African immigrants and discussing the implications of that.

Table 1.1 depicts disciplinary referral data from 2017-2018 and provides evidence that Black—in this context, primarily African immigrant—boys were bearing the brunt of discipline disparities at North under my watch as lead disciplinarian. Chi-square tests show a significant relationship with being referred at least once for discipline at $p < .05$ for gender[2] ($p = .000$), race/ethnicity ($p = .000$), and lunch status ($p = .000$), but only a marginally significant relationship with home language ($p = .051$). The weaker relationship with home language hints that discipline disparities impacting Black students at North may have more to do with the color of their skin than their African cultural backgrounds. Since nearly every Black student that year (123 of 129) received free or reduced price lunch, it is difficult to separate the impact of race/ethnicity and lunch status on discipline referral for Black students. An indirect approach is to compare the referral rate (in this analysis, the proportion of individuals in a group receiving at least one referral) for White students receiving Free or Reduced Lunch (.29) with the referral rate for White students who don't receive a subsidy (.25). The difference between these two rates pales in comparison to the difference between either of them and the rate of referral for Black students (.44), suggesting that North's discipline disparities in 2017-2018 were related more to race than to socioeconomic status. This indication that socioeconomic status does not explain racial disproportionality in discipline is supported by other studies (Skiba et al., 2002; Wallace et al., 2008). Finally, comparing the rates of referral for White females (.12), Black females (.35), White males (.38), and Black males (.54), spotlights the particularly disparate rate of disciplinary referral for that final group. Black males made up 13% of the student body but 39% of the students referred for discipline at least once in 2017-2018. Further calculation shows that Black

[2] While a binary gender distinction appears to have weight in this problem of practice, North has a small but growing population of transgender, gender fluid, and non-binary students. This could create or reveal additional relationships between gender and discipline.

males also made up 38% of those students referred at least 10 times for discipline in both 2016-2017 and 2017-2018, clarifying that this gender and race-based discipline gap exists along the spectrum of disciplinary involvement and establishing this research study's specific problem of practice.

Table 1.1

Referral Status by Population Characteristic

Characteristic	Not Referred	Referred (proportion)	Total
Total	305	158 (.34)	463
Gender			
Female	168	46 (.21)	214
Male	137	112 (.45)	249
Race/ethnicity			
Hispanic/Latino	14	9 (.39)	23
American Indian/Alaska Native	3	0 (.00)	3
Asian	14	7 (.33)	21
Black	72	57 (.44)	129
White	190	67 (.26)	257
Two or more races	12	18 (.60)	30
Home language			
English	211	95 (.31)	306
Other	94	63 (.40)	157
Lunch			
Paid	162	53 (.25)	215
Reduced	13	6 (.32)	19
Free	130	99 (.43)	229

Problem of Practice

At North Middle School—a Northeastern public school—race/ethnicity, gender, and free and reduced lunch program participation predicted rates of disciplinary referral in 2017-2018. Discipline disparities reached alarming significance for Black boys, who—at North—were

largely first and second generation African immigrants. These students made up 13% of the student body in 2017-2018 but 39% of those students referred for discipline. This raises concerns about equitable treatment, equitable access to education, and equitable educational outcomes (Gregory et al., 2010; Losen & Gillespie, 2012; Noguera, 2003). Similar disparities have been documented nationally for Black boys (Anyon et al., 2014; McFadden et al., 1992; Skiba et al., 2002; Skiba et al., 2011), and the federal government has exhorted state and local education agencies to prioritize remediation (U.S. Department of Education & U.S. Department of Justice, 2014). The Trump administration subsequently rescinded that guidance (U.S. Department of Education & U.S Department of Justice, 2018), but lessons learned from this research study may have relevance to other schools and educational agencies still committed to that work. This study may also add to understanding of how discipline disparities impacting Black American students also impact African immigrants.

Statement of Positionality

Multiple aspects of my person, position, worldview, and identity inevitably shape this research study and the conclusions drawn in it. Reflection on that positionality is a crucial part of my own research process and enhances the reader's ability to interpret, evaluate, and apply my research (Holmes, 2014). Although not exhaustive, the following descriptions provide some key elements of my positionality as a researcher.

First, I am a middle-class, monolingual, cisgender White male who has only superficial knowledge of cultures beyond my own or of what it is like to suffer discrimination. I was also rarely disciplined in school, despite showing periodic defiance to my teachers and administrators. In many ways, I am immune to and ignorant of the lived experiences of the students I am writing about and likely to hold uninformed and biased attitudes about them. Indeed, part of my journey

as an educator and educational administrator has been the unearthing of my ignorance and bias and the ongoing work to address them.

Second, I have had the luxury of picking and choosing when to engage in that work. I have arguably been morally lazy (Jensen, 2005). In terms of Helms' White racial identity model (1990), I believe I am often stuck in the pseudoindependence stage, where attempts at anti-racist action are paternalistic and focused on changing the other instead of focused on changing those with inherited power. In fact, some might interpret this research study as an example of that. I also exhibit what Day-Vines, et al. (2007), call continuing/incongruent broaching behaviors: awkwardly and mechanically introducing race, ethnicity, and culture into my conversations with students and staff as opposed to holding a reliably organic, authentic space for those conversations.

Third, I am the assistant principal at the research study site so have positional power over school climate, behavioral management climate, and disciplinary procedures and outcomes. To the extent that there are disparate disciplinary outcomes at North, I bear significant responsibility. To the extent that my intervention study outcomes show positive results, one could question my own confirmation bias or undue influence on the emergence and framing of the results. To the extent that it shows no results, one could question my own insight into the underlying mechanisms in the problem of practice, in which I am likely complicit. More importantly, a White male school disciplinarian is a fraught and problematic champion of social justice. I have the almost unquestioned power to enforce all the cultural norms and imbalances that benefit me. And I can do so under the guise of doing good. Under pressure from the 19th Century feminist movement, for example, the United States legal system switched from defending domestic abuse by asserting the natural authority of a husband to defending it by

asserting the privacy of domestic life (Siegel, 1997). Those in power tend, when under critique, to re-encode their power into contemporarily socially acceptable frameworks, and I have the potential to do the same with this research study and in my professional practice.

Fourth, having worked in a variety of school settings (private to public, special education to gifted education), I hold conflicted and changing personal beliefs about school discipline. On one hand, I sympathize with the conservative instinct that students who disrupt a learning environment should be removed from it for the sake of the other students. On the other, I subscribe to liberal and progressive narratives that punitive and exclusionary discipline replicates societal violence and oppression and that restorative and trauma-informed practices can help reverse those injustices. Furthermore, I come to this research with the assumption that discipline gaps are the product of a complex host of factors, among which I assume racism present but not sole. This research study is part of my ongoing work to sort out these ideas and to support my school community in becoming a better place for all students. Be clear: I am not performing sterile, controlled research from the perspective of a neutral outsider. I am in the mess (Cook, 2009), using the theoretical and methodological rigors of dissertation research as one way to navigate that mess.

Finally, I am unquestionably augmenting my own privilege by completing this work. I am leveraging multiple forms of privilege and capital to do so. It will earn me a doctorate and increase the likelihood that I will later assume school leadership positions with even greater power and influence over the lives of marginalized students and their families. By engaging the emotional and intellectual labor of such students and families in the course of this research study's intervention, I will earn a claim to expertise about their experiences and about how to serve them well, at the same time getting to define what counts as "serving them well." Cynthia

Tyson writes that "educational research achieved at the expense of others is… an act of oppression" (2003, p. 23). Due to my positionality, this is an immediate and vivid concern. I have a moral obligation to attempt an intervention that benefits students and families of color at least as much as it benefits me. How to do this within a system that already bends to give me unearned advantage and conferred dominance (McIntosh, P., 1988), is a question I must keep at the forefront and one that I interrogate in greater detail in the final pages of this paper.

Theoretical Frameworks

A clearly-articulated theoretical framework provides organizing structure and internal coherence to a research study while also naming basic assumptions that could otherwise be obscured (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). This research study adopts network theory (Neal, J. W. & Neal, 2013) as a theoretical framework to understand the factors related to the problem of practice, interpreting that theory in light of the observation that the discipline process is composed of a serial stream of social interactions (Irvin, Tobin, Sprague, Sugai, & Vincent, 2004). Network theory envisions a complex web of social interactions underlying any problem. Irvin and colleagues' concept of a serial stream helps us articulate how that web leads to and shapes three key moments in the discipline process: the precipitating behavior, the decision of an adult to intervene, and the assignment of consequences.

To elaborate, network theory is an ecological model that frames actors as nodes embedded within multiple settings of social interaction, each node and setting in a reciprocally causal network in which any node could influence or be influenced by nodes in the same or other settings (Neal, J. W. & Neal, 2013). Although a traditional nested socio-ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) has been proposed as a theoretical framework for understanding problematic behavior (Dishion & Patterson, 1997) and behavior management climate (Mitchell

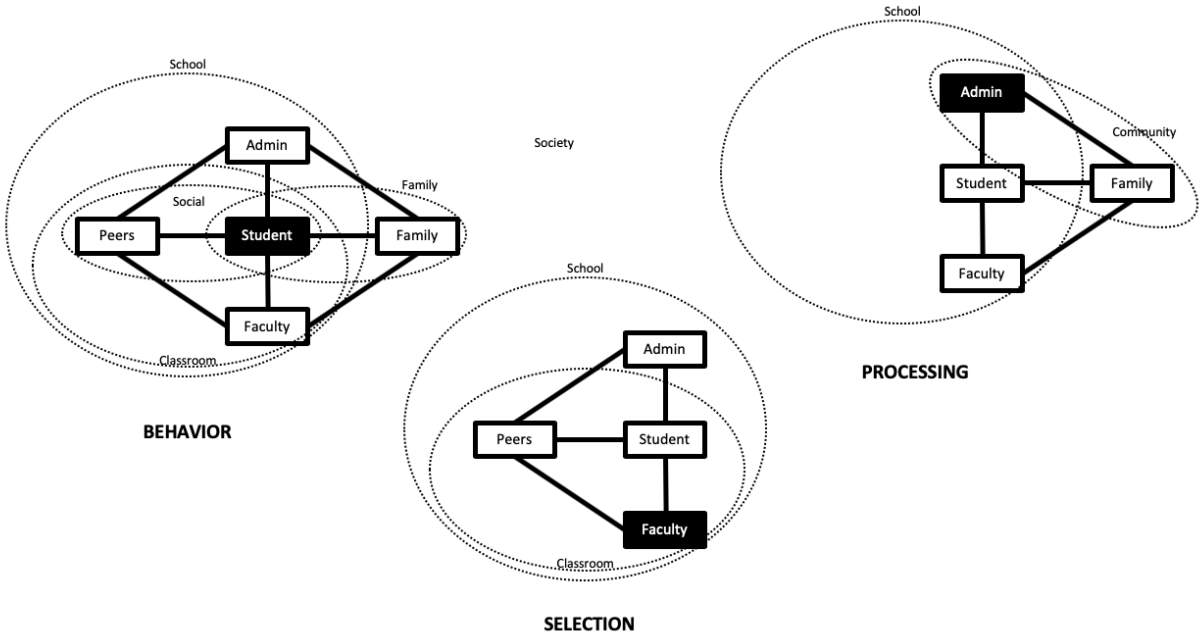
& Bradshaw, 2013), network theory offers a more fluid, dynamic framework by recognizing that not all settings are nested neatly within each other and that the dynamics between actors are more important than the setting itself. Network theory facilitates a wide view of how discipline disparities emerge from a complex interaction of forces including the political, economic, and societal; the cultural, social, and familial; and the intrapersonal (Neal, J. W. & Christens, 2014).

It helps to further note that discipline involves a chain of events. In a discussion of the validity of office discipline referrals as an outcome measure in educational research, Irvin et al. observe that, not only does discipline emerge from the complex interaction of community values, but it also takes shape over the course of several behavioral moments: "a student's response to a given situation, a teacher/staff member's response to the student's behavior, and an administrator's response to the student–teacher interaction" (2004, p. 143). In considering the origins of discipline disparities, one can thus separately investigate differential behavior, differential selection, and differential processing (Gregory et al., 2010). This is a key point that bears repeating in simple terms: Two groups may have disparate disciplinary outcomes because one behaves worse, because one is more likely to get "in trouble" given the same behavior, or because one receives harsher punishments given the same behavior. All three factors should be considered.

Merging network theory with this idea of a serial stream in discipline, Figure 1.1 depicts a simplified network of interactions at each moment in that stream. Each box represents a node and each circle a setting. Each network is also embedded in and shaped by the broader societal arena. Black boxes indicate the presumed principal actor at each moment in the stream.

Figure 1.1

Networked Model of Serial Stream of Discipline



Note. Depicts ecological systems impacting a student at three moments in the serial stream of discipline. Boxes represent nodes, and circles represent settings. Black boxes mark the presumed principal actor at each moment. The 'Society' setting encompasses the entire figure. Adapted from "Nested or networked? Future directions for ecological systems theory," by J. W. Neal and Z. P. Neal, 2013, *Social Development, 22*, p. 728. Copyright 2013 by John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

This hybrid theoretical framework allows for a critical, nuanced investigation of the problem of practice. Taken uncritically, discipline is simply a necessary response to problem behaviors: a student misbehaves, an adult names the misbehavior, and an adult assigns a punishment. This viewpoint, although intuitive and straight forward, would wholly and naively blame students for this study's problem of practice. It would suggest that Black boys simply misbehave more, so they get punished more. A network systems theory, however, prevents us from interpreting the problem solely through the individual (J. W. Neal & Christens, 2014). From a network theory perspective, for instance, problem behaviors might emerge because of student-level variables,

but they could also emerge because of dynamics in the classroom or the school setting, because of cultural differences, or as a symptom of larger structural injustices. The notion of a serial stream adds further nuance to interpretation, highlighting that incidences of school discipline emerge over successive moments, each of which might have a unique bearing on the problem. This hybrid framework can also help focus the intervention by highlighting malleable sets of interactions (Cook et al., 2018) at moments in the serial stream of discipline that fall within the plausible scope of an applied dissertation. While the full complexity of factors and causes of the problem of practice can be considered, an intervention must target a specific, strategically selected piece of that puzzle.

Factors in Discipline Disparities

The following section explores and synthesizes extant literature on causes and factors of discipline disparities. It focuses on literature relevant to Black males and uses the theoretical framework to organize its synthesis of the literature. Before presenting the synthesis, though, a note about topicality is in order.

Relevance of Extant Discipline Research to African Immigrants

Most empirical studies about racial, ethnic, and gender disparities in discipline focus on Black American students (Little & Welsh, 2019). The following literature review draws primarily from such studies but not merely for lack of other options. Such studies also relate directly to the disciplinary outcomes of African immigrants at North because of the deep significance of race, and of Blackness in particular, in the United States. Of course, race is not monolithic. Commentator Eugene Robinson (2010) argues, for example, that "Black America," long unified under the shared experience of oppression, has disintegrated into five groups with distinct experiences and agendas: a transcendent "elite," an enfranchised "middle-class," an

"abandoned" group stuck in poverty, and "emergent" multi-racial and African immigrant populations. African immigrant youth, for example, are often perceived as entering school with more social and cultural capital than Black American youth and as having more dispositional readiness to succeed in school (Awokoya, 2009; George Mwangi & English, 2017). Furthermore, African immigrant parents often see themselves and their children as distinct from other Blacks (Amoah, 2014). Yet, Robinson concedes, "race still matters" (2010, p. 24). "There was, and is," he writes, "something stubbornly powerful about race as a dividing line" (p. 37).

One American Civil Liberties Union report local to North warned against treating all multilingual students, immigrant students, and students of color as interchangeable, but found repeatedly through interviews that immigrant students and families perceive racial bias in discipline and attribute it to a generalized bias against Blackness (LeBlanc, 2017). An African immigrant may be seen at first as African, but in short order our society codes her as Black (Forman, 2001; Kapteijns & Arman, 2008). One analysis of student self-report data from the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002 showed no discipline disparity between White students and first-generation African immigrants but showed that second- and third-generation African immigrants were much more likely to be disciplined than White students, despite exhibiting fewer misbehaviors (Peguero, Shekarkhar, Popp, and Koo, 2015). The children of African immigrants, in this way, can encounter the same barriers as Black students whose families have been in the United States for many generations. African becomes Black in the milieux of structural and systemic racism. The fact that well-documented discipline gaps for Black boys writ large translate directly at North Middle School to African immigrant boys suggests as much.

One potential mechanism is the pull to assimilation. African immigrants have complex racial, ethnic, and cultural identities (Amoah, 2014). Within their African-ness, they see racial,

ethnic, cultural, and tribal distinctions generally opaque to White American observers. Within their American-ness, they and their children face continuous options including between identifying as African immigrants or identifying with Black Americans (Rong & Brown, 2002). Race, ethnicity, and culture is multiple and hybrid for African immigrants (George Mwangi & English, 2017). One ethnographic study, for example, described a dizzying variety of national origins, educational backgrounds, and class attainments at a thriving pan-African church in Indiana. It showed that the members of the congregation shift fluidly between particular national and ethnic identities, a pan-African and pan-immigrant identity, and a Black American identity (Habecker, 2017). A two-year ethnographic examination of 10 Midwestern high school students from the Democratic Republic of Congo traces their fluency in shifting between and playing with languages to assert a fluid, polyphonous ecology of identities for themselves (Davila, 2018). For youth in the developmental throes of identity formation, though, that fluidity can take on an inexorable directionality. One study of Somali American immigrants—one of the largest contingents of African immigrant students at North—highlighted that children and parents incorporate U.S. culture into their identity at different rates, causing dissonance within families (Awokoya, 2009), a dynamic described empathetically and journalistically by Anderson (2019). Another study of Somali American youth described the movement away from parental culture and toward Black American culture to be a natural part of the adolescent fitting-in process (Forman, 2001). African immigrant youth "learn Blackness" at school and from a popular media that superficially vaunts Black American culture (Awokoya, 2009; Waters, 1994). This dynamic persists into young adulthood: Among college students born in the United States to African immigrant parents, the draw to American-ness, especially American Blackness, can overwhelm the desire to remain African (Awokoya, 2009).

There is push as well as pull, though. The shift from African to Black is partially affected by racism. Although Robinson sees expanding options for Black racial identity (2010), part of the American story is that Whites have long seen people with African heritage, no matter their ethnicity or cultural background, in simplistic racial terms (Robinson, 2010; Rong & Brown, 2002). Although African immigrant families were not necessarily seen as Black in Africa (Ibrahim, 2004), they are seen as so in the United States (Forman, 2001), and blackness as a racial construct involves a caste status. That is both the foundation and the legacy of slavery in our country (Waters, 1994). Consequently, the United States racial hierarchy can undermine the social and economic mobility potential sometimes ascribed to recent immigrant minorities (Awokoya, 2009; George Mwangi & English, 2017). Somali immigrants, for example, did not think of themselves as Black in Africa (Forman, 2001). In fact, they consider themselves as of a higher status than other Africans. Upon arrival to the state containing North, they initially discriminated against their Somali Bantu brethren who have more sub-Saharan and less Arab genealogy (Anderson, 2019). They sometimes see themselves, furthermore, as superior to Black Americans and are thus surprised to find themselves lumped into the Black underclass in the United States (Kapteijns & Arman, 2008). Nearly all African immigrant families at North fled their home countries, sacrificing what prosperity they had for safety and for the chance to seed prosperity for their descendents. Most now live in low-income neighborhoods, are themselves visibly poor or working class, and are visible minorities—a dynamic that triply assigns them to the American underclass (Kapteijns & Arman, 2008).

Parents may resist this pull and push, but their children and their children's children might see little choice but to appropriate it (Forman, 2001; Waters, 1994). They experience daily micro-aggressions based both on anti-immigrant and racial bias (LeBlanc, 2017), and youth

absorb racial stereotypes readily, even at a very young age (Cristol & Gimbert, 2008). To own and reform the identity assigned to them is to claim some measure of agency within a racist system. To appropriate that identity also expresses a political solidarity with Black Americans (Awokoya, 2009). In 1999, New York City police shot an unarmed African immigrant, Amadou Diallo, 41 times in a case of mistaken identity. Malian American scholar Manthia Diawara observes that

> Culturally, Amadou Diallo, not unlike most immigrants to this country, was different from African Americans, and perhaps even prejudiced against them. But Amadou Diallo was also a black man, and that visual sign is enough to get an African or Caribbean mistaken for an African American in the streets of New York. …Little do the Amadou Diallos of the world know that the black man in America bears the curse of Cain, and that in America they, too, are considered black men, not Fulanis, Mandingos, or Wolofs (2003, pp. viii-ix).

He also tells the story of Abner Louima, a Haitian-American subjected to unthinkable treatment by the same police department two years earlier. Stories of "immigrants submitted to the ritualistic white violence generally reserved for African Americans," he argues, necessarily awaken Africans and Caribbeans "to the issues of race in America" (p. ix). When young African immigrants feel mistreated by American racism, they can be expected to identify with Black American culture, which developed in part in opposition to White supremacy (Diawara, 2003; Forman, 2001). It is one way to cry foul and to affirm self-worth (Waters, 1994).

All this exposition is not to collapse polyphonous racial, cultural, and ethnic identities into one. That itself would be an act of White supremacy. It is only to suggest that extant research on discipline disparities is relevant to African immigrants despite its focus on Black

American youth. The remainder of this chapter explores that research in detail, using the theoretical framework discussed earlier as an organizing structure.

Primary and Secondary Factors

One often-cited exploration of factors in racial disciplinary gaps (Gregory et al., 2010) identifies five possible explanations: poverty and neighborhood characteristics, low achievement, differential behavior (disparities in student behavior), differential selection (disparities in adult decisions to refer), and differential processing (disparities in assignment of consequences). In keeping with the framework of a serial stream, this literature review updates Gregory et al.'s model by positing differential behavior, differential selection, and differential processing as primary factors and, within those discussions, identifying literature-based secondary factors leading to each of the primary factors. In keeping with network theory, it posits secondary factors that involve the complex interactions of individuals within and between settings and under the influence of broader societal and cultural factors.

Differential behavior. The simplest interpretation of this research study's problem of practice says that Black boys at North—who are largely African immigrants—get referred more often for discipline because they misbehave more. As will become clear, much evidence contradicts this interpretation. Nevertheless, to the extent that differential behavior might contribute to the high rate of disciplinary referral for Black boys, below are four secondary factors that could explain why.

First, one could consider adverse childhood experiences such as scarcity, exposure to violence, or the imprisonment of a family member. Beginning in the 1990s with a major study by Kaiser Permanente (Felitti et al., 1998), such experiences have been explicitly linked to a number of negative health and behavioral outcomes across the lifespan. Several recent studies have

further linked these experiences to behavioral problems in middle school (Eriksen, Hvidtfeldt, & Lilleør, 2017; Hunt, Slack, & Berger, 2017; McKelvey, Edge, Mesman, Whiteside-Mansell, & Bradley, 2018). An analysis of survey responses from a national sample of 84,837 revealed that Black children averaged 1.7 adverse childhood experiences as described by the Kaiser Permanente framework compared to 0.9 for White children (Slopen et al., 2016). Although the literature does not generalize about adverse childhood experiences of African immigrants, the scope of those experiences can expand dramatically to include torture, assassination of or separation from family members, seizure of assets, residence in refugee camps, and perilous journeys over seas, through countryside, and through the shifting and politicized border bureaucracies of different nations—all experiences related personally by North families to this researcher and his colleagues. Traumatic experiences and adversity for immigrant families can be found all along the journey from country of origin, through the migration process, and to experiences in the United States (Hart, 2009). If adversity can lead to problematic behavior, then differences in exposure to adverse experiences could potentially help explain differences in school behavior along lines of race or national origin.

Second, race and gender-based differences in academic skills may also inform differences in school behaviors, since students who struggle with the academic tasks of school may act out in frustration. Test performance gaps between White and Black students are widely documented (McCall, Hauser, Cronin, Kingsbury, & Houser, 2006). Although gender gaps in achievement are less pronounced, boys appear to achieve somewhat less highly than girls (Kindlon, Thompson, & Barker, 1999; Reardon, Fahle, Kalogrides, Podolsky, & Zarate, 2018; Tyre, 2008; Whitmire, 2012). An analysis of New York City Public Schools test data found an advantage for immigrant students overall but significant variation across groups and contexts (Schwartz &

Stiefel, 2006). For instance, little difference was found in the standardized mathematics and English test scores of U.S.-born and foreign-born black students. In North's district during 2017-2018, 14% of ELLs and 30% of Black students met state expectations in standardized English testing, compared to 61% of White students. In mathematics, 10% of ELLs, 15% of Black students, and 48% of White students met expectations (Maine Department of Education, 2019). Although one can debate the validity of state tests as a measure of academic skills, these numbers suggest at least one kind of achievement gap at North along lines of both national origin and race, and such gaps correlate with differential behavior. In an ethnically diverse longitudinal sample of 400 low-income children, path analysis showed that early low literacy achievement predicted aggressive school behavior in the middle grades (Miles & Stipek, 2006). In another study with a much larger national dataset, lower grade point average was found to predict a host of delinquent behaviors in adolescence (Choi, 2007). Thus, racial and gender differences in academic skills and performance could theoretically contribute to differential behavior.

Third, students might act out more in classroom microsystems with less-skilled teachers. In fact, good student behavior serves as an outcome indicator of teacher skill in professional evaluation systems such as the Framework for Teaching (Danielson, 2011). Strong instruction and strong classroom management minimize problematic behaviors (Martella & Marchand-Martella, 2015; Parsonson, 2012), and some studies suggest the particular importance of this formula for Black and male students (Davis & Jordan, 1994). For example, at one urban high school, the teachers Black students perceived as having low academic expectations and low caring struggled with particularly high rates of defiance (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008). Similarly, in a case study of four administrators in predominately Black middle schools, suspensions were predicted by inadequate structure in the classrooms (Mukuria, 2002). Noguera (2003) observed

ten urban schools for two years and lamented how often students in the high-suspension schools could be found with little to do in class but play games or watch movies. Indeed, academic disengagement was the strongest school-related or non-school-related predictor of discipline referral for Black males in another analysis of 4,164 eighth through tenth graders (Toldson, McGee, & Lemmons, 2015).

There is also direct evidence that building teacher skills shrinks discipline gaps. The outcome evaluation of one intensive teacher coaching intervention, for example, uncovered an unintended and striking result: the elimination of the discipline gap between White and Black students in five middle and high schools (Gregory, Allen, Mikami, Hafen, & Pianta, 2015). This result persisted even a year after the conclusion of the intervention, and mediational analysis attributed it specifically to increased engagement of students in higher-order analysis and inquiry (Gregory et al., 2016). Differential teacher skill in classroom management and in eliciting intellectual engagement therefore appears a potential factor related to differential behavior, perhaps especially for Black boys. This factor could be amplified in the case of North by varying ability to teach ELLs. One might assume that the three ELL specialists within the building have the requisite competencies, but all of North's teachers need the same competencies (Samson & Collins, 2012).

Finally, a gender- or race-biased school climate could precipitate undesired behaviors. Perceptions of climate have been associated with externalizing behaviors, most strongly for boys (Kuperminc, Leadbeater, Emmons, & Blatt, 1997). Several observers argue that a typical school climate is unfriendly to biological or enculturated attributes of male behavior such as physicality and testing of authority (Kindlon et al., 1999; Sommers, 2000; Tyre, 2008; Whitmire, 2012). In some ways, school may be a rare locus in our society of anti-male bias. It is almost certainly also

a not-so-rare locus of racial bias. In a survey of over 2,000 high school students about racial climate, negative perception of racial climate predicted individual discipline problems. For boys, this association was strongest for Black students (Mattison & Aber, 2007). Rebellion against injustice, which might also relate to identity maintenance (Tajfel, 1974), could explain part of this relationship. Black boys may consider the distance between themselves and what the school projects as an image of an ideal student and determine that the effort to close that distance is not worth the Herculean effort it would require (Akerlof & Kranton, 2002). They may instead select an alternate identity ideal that is at odds with school norms.

As described earlier, African immigrant boys may find this oppositional identity appealing, especially with each successive generation (Awokoya, 2009; Forman, 2001; Ibrahim, 2004; Kapteijns & Arman, 2008; Rong & Fitchett, 2008; Waters, 1994). This sort of protective disidentification has been identified as a potential contributing factor in achievement gaps (Banks, J. A., 2015) and could also have bearing on differential behavior. When students decide that school automatically sorts them out of the success trajectory, they may lose motivation to play along with the game, resulting in what gets labeled as problematic behavior (Noguera, 2003). This theory echoes a finding that in classrooms with inequitably distributed social capital, students with behavioral difficulties are less able to stay engaged in the academic environment (Cappella, Kim, Neal, & Jackson, 2013).

Despite these four viable explanations for differential behavior—adverse experiences, academic skill, teacher skill, and school climate—a crucial note of caution is in order. Kendi (2019) warns that the differential behavior hypothesis is a pernicious form of racism.

> As long as the mind thinks there is something behaviorally wrong with a racial group, the mind can never be antiracist. As long as the mind oppresses the oppressed by thinking

> their oppressive environment has retarded their behavior, the mind can never be antiracist (p. 104).

Furthermore, a wide body of evidence belies group differential behavior for Black boys. One case study of four teachers in an urban middle school noted an absence of discipline disparities, hypothesizing that this counterexample undermines the notion that Black boys behave worse than peers (Monroe, 2009). Although there is some evidence that boys do violate behavioral expectations more than girls (Skiba et al., 2002), several large-scale studies of self-report data show that racial discrepancies in discipline outcomes far outstrip peer or self-reports of problem behaviors and deviant attitudes (Dinkes, Cataldi, & Lin-Kelly, 2007; Horner, Fireman, & Wang, 2010; Huang, 2018; Wallace et al., 2008). Reviewers might attribute this to student bias in reporting, but the same pattern holds for teacher reporting of student behavior: Even after controlling for teacher rating of student behavior, Black students were nearly twice as likely to be suspended than White students in a nationally representative sample of 8,755 tenth graders from 500 U.S. schools (Finn & Servoss, 2015). Likewise, in tracking 1,339 Baltimore first graders through seventh grade, timing of first school removal was predicted by race even beyond teacher rating of aggressive behavior (Petras, Masyn, Buckley, Ialongo, & Kellam, 2011). Similarly, even after controlling for teacher-report of behavior problems, Black students were at the highest risk for disciplinary referral in 381 sampled classrooms (Bradshaw, Mitchell, O'Brennan, & Leaf, 2010). Teachers in another study were more likely to see student misbehavior as indicative of a pattern if the students were Black (Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015). Seeing that differential behavior does not by itself explain discipline disparities, we turn next to differential selection.

Differential selection. Teachers make continuous split-second decisions in the classroom

microsystem (Shavelson & Stern, 1981), including decisions about whether or not to intervene with a student behavior. Through discursive analysis of classroom observations, lesson tapes, and interviews at one diverse Midwestern high school, researchers noted that suspension events did not reliably follow from strong violence or abuse. Rather, they emerged somewhat unpredictably from contextual disciplinary moments in which race and gender relations were salient (Vavrus & Cole, 2002). Most teachers are White women (Shen, Wegenke, & Cooley, 2003), and race- and gender-based differential selection of which behaviors to intervene in could contribute to disparate discipline rates for Black boys. Extant empirical literature supports cultural difference and bias as two potential mechanisms in that dynamic.

The cultural difference hypothesis identifies differences in male and female and between Black and White cultural norms for speech, movement, and emotion as the root of misunderstandings that result in unnecessary selection for discipline (Monroe, 2005; Townsend, 2000). Even greater cultural differences may be at play between African immigrant students and White teachers (Alidou, 2012; Rong & Brown, 2002). Such cultural differences may also impact the fit of school and classroom norms to either the biological needs of boys or their socialized gender behaviors (Bertrand & Pan, 2013; Trost et al., 2002; Warrington, Younger, & Williams, 2000). At the same time, typical female "misbehaviors" involve covert relational aggression and don't clash as harshly with school and classroom norms as the louder and more physical misbehaviors sometimes associated with boys (Blencowe, 2007). Finally, some argue specifically that Black American male subculture, for a host of reasons, can be at odds with normative school culture (Day-Vines & Day-Hairston, 2005). Several ethnographies show that African immigrant youth, especially generations 1.5 and beyond, can grow to identify with that subculture (Awokoya, 2009; Forman, 2001; Waters, 1994). This may be most true for poor and

working-class African immigrants, who discover that they are treated similarly to Black Americans and "that schooling will not necessarily guarantee economic prosperity and social mobility" (Rong & Fitchett, 2008).

The cultural difference hypothesis for differential selection finds support in a recent analysis of one year of discipline data at a large urban high school. That study determined that when teachers and students differed in race, there was a fiftyfold increase in the likelihood of referral for defiance, insubordination, or disrespect. When gender differed, there was a thirtyfold increase (Liiv, 2015). In another recent study of 274 teachers in 18 schools, structural equation modeling showed a significant relationship between observed culturally responsive teaching with positive student behaviors, suggesting that a race mismatch effect could be mitigated through culturally responsive practices (Larson, Pas, Bradshaw, Rosenberg, & Day-Vines, 2018).

Differential selection based on cultural difference could be characterized as a sort of innocent mesosystemic misunderstanding. Black students and White teachers simply have different cultures, and so dissonance would be natural. This may be especially true in the case of African immigrant students. This incompletely describes the problem, however, which also involves more insidious and macrosystemic forms of bias, especially racial bias. A recent survey of over 1,000 White adults who work or volunteer with children showed that they were twice as likely to rate Black children and teens as unintelligent or violence-prone as White children and teens (Priest et al., 2018). In another study, researchers showed 136 middle school teachers videos of students walking. Factorial analysis of variance showed that the teachers inferred low achievement, high aggression, and the need for special education services when viewing a "strolling" walking style in Black males (Neal, L. V. I., McCray, & Webb-Johnson, 2003).

This kind of implicit bias—unconscious or unexamined attitudes and stereotypes

(Greenwald & Krieger, 2006)—may find special traction in ambiguous situations. In examining one year of referral and consequence data for the 19 middle schools in a large, urban district, researchers found that boys were referred for more serious behaviors than girls, but Black students were no more likely to be referred for serious behaviors than White students except for in the case of subjectively determined behaviors such as disrespect and defiance (Skiba et al., 2002). Hypothesizing that such bias could stem in part from the reflexive use of stereotyping in the absence of close relationships, researchers analyzed Denver Public Schools' discipline data to see if students of color were more likely to be referred for discipline in common areas where the adults they encounter may not know them closely. Instead, the data showed that students of color are most likely to be referred by their own classroom teachers, suggesting the bias behind discipline disparities is deeply structural (Anyon et al., 2018). Using Critical Race Theory as a framework, one ethnography of teacher racial attitudes in two Western school districts argued that teachers both wittingly and unwittingly replicate and reinforce structural racism—practices, policies, and norms that transcend and incubate personal racist behaviors (Vaught & Castagno, 2008). Although bias, as both building block and product of structural racism, may not explain the entirety of differential selection, given the history of racism in the United States, it seems a highly likely factor in the problem of practice taken up in the present study.

Differential processing. For Gregory et al. (2010), selection refers to the decision of a teacher to ask an administrator to apply a disciplinary consequence, and processing refers to an administrator's assignment of consequence. In this view, differential selection originates with the teacher in the classroom microsystem and differential processing originates with the administrator in the school microsystem. That division is reflected in the theoretical framework diagram in Figure 1.1. At North Middle School, however, administrators often make selection

decisions in common areas such as the hallway, and teachers typically choose consequences for minor (fleeting or non-intense) behaviors in all school settings. Thus, similar forces would be at play at North in both the selection and processing stage, and the same factors discussed above for differential selection—cultural difference and racial bias—could also lead to differential processing.

One analysis of discipline data from a large Midwestern school district found race and gender disparities in office referral but not in numbers of days suspended, leading the authors to suggest that discipline gaps stem primarily from differential selection (Skiba et al., 2002). However other studies suggest that differential processing also plays a role. Teachers evaluating hypothetical scenarios with student race as the independent variable were more likely to recommend punitive discipline or special education referral for emotional disturbance for Black students than for White students, and that those teachers who recommended the harshest discipline also had the highest scores on an implicit bias assessment (Xie, 2015). Teachers in another study were more likely to propose harsher punishments for Black students than White students after two disciplinary infractions (Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015). Among a national sample of 436 schools, Skiba et al. (2011) determined that Black students were overrepresented in suspensions and underrepresented for lesser consequences across offense types. Another study found a higher rate of suspension for Black students across 53 Missouri counties in all categories of offense examined (Nicholson-Crotty, Birchmeier, & Valentine, 2009). Similar patterns were uncovered in one year of Indiana Public Schools' discipline data and one year of Denver Public School's data (Anyon et al., 2014; Skiba et al., 2014). Furthermore, two slightly older studies found Black students and boys far more likely than White students or girls to receive corporal punishment after controlling for offense (McFadden et al., 1992; Shaw & Braden, 1990). Thus, it

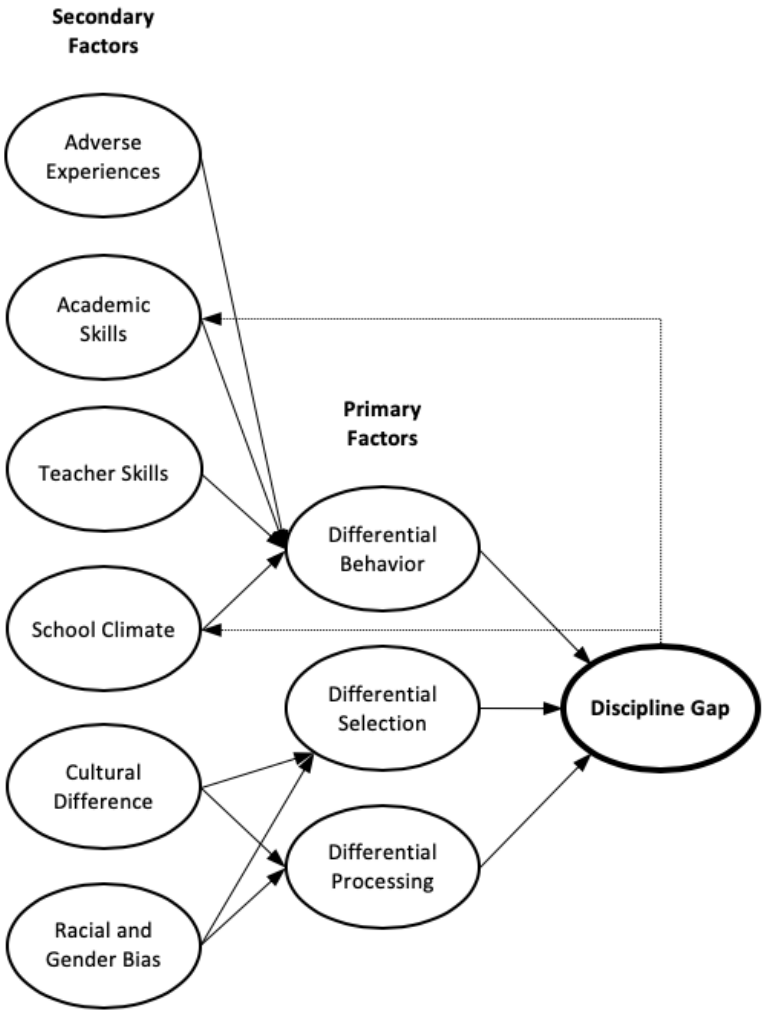
appears that differential processing may also contribute to discipline gaps, perhaps by virtue of either cultural difference or racial and gender bias.

Summary of Factors Potentially Leading to Discipline Disparities

This literature review is neither exhaustive nor definitive. It does establish, however, a research base that supports each of the primary factors—differential behavior, differential selection, and differential processing—as possible contributors to disparate discipline for Black boys. There is some evidence that adverse experiences could trigger differential behavior for Black students (McKelvey et al., 2018; Slopen et al., 2016), that relatively lower academic skills could trigger differential behavior for Black students and boys (McCall et al., 2006; Miles & Stipek, 2006; Whitmire, 2012), that poor teacher skills may lead to differential behavior for Black boys (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Mukuria, 2002), and that a biased school climate may encourage Black students and boys to violate behavioral expectations (Noguera, 2003; Mattison & Aber, 2007). There is also evidence, however, that differential behavior does not sufficiently explain discipline disparities (Bradshaw et al., 2010; Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015). Differential selection and differential processing are both implicated, with cultural difference and racial and gender bias being possible explanatory factors (Anyon et al., 2014; Skiba et al., 2014; Xie, 2015). Although this chapter does not claim to fully map the factors leading to discipline disparities, it does offer a rough conceptual framework of mechanisms involved with the problem of practice. Figure 1.2 depicts the relationships between the problem of practice and the primary and secondary factors identified in the literature synthesis and the problem of practice. These mechanisms are investigated in the context of North Middle School by Chapter 2's needs assessment study.

Figure 1.2

Conceptual Framework for the Problem of Practice



Note: Depicts primary and secondary factors leading to discipline gap. Dotted arrows indicate feedback from outcome that may reinforce secondary factors.

Chapter 2

Stakeholder Perceptions of Factors in the Problem of Practice

At North Middle School, a culturally and economically diverse public school in a small Northeastern city, Black males made up 13% of the student body in 2017-2018 but 39% of those students who received at least one office discipline referral and a similar percentage of those referred ten times or more. In contrast, White females made up 25% of the student body but only 9% of those referred at least once. This research study seeks to understand the underlying factors associated with this disparity and to intervene in it.

Chapter 1 established the referral rate for Black males—who at North are nearly all first and second generation African immigrants—as the most significant discipline disparity at North, described concern about that same disparity at schools across the United States, and reviewed research literature related to its mechanisms. It also presented a conceptual framework (Figure 1.2) hypothesizing three possible primary factors in North's discipline gap between Black boys and peers: differential behavior, differential selection, and differential processing. It also hypothesized six secondary factors: adverse experiences, academic skills, teacher skills, school climate, cultural difference, and adult bias. The present chapter describes a qualitative needs assessment study performed at North in February, 2019 to compare stakeholder perceptions to the conceptual framework. From that analysis, it identifies differential selection as a focus factor for intervention and stakeholder interest in an intervention that increases dialogue between White faculty and staff and students of color.

Context of the Needs Assessment Study

North Middle School, where I serve as assistant principal, is one of three buildings serving grades six through eight in a Northeastern state's largest city and largest school district.

In 2017-2018, the year in which the problem of practice was established, of the 463 students at North Middle School, 248 received Free or Reduced Lunch, 206 were of color, and 157 lived in a household with a primary language other than English, with at least 30 languages represented. Despite the relative diversity of the student body, the North faculty and staff included only three people of color that year, who were also the only three native speakers of another language.

Among the 61 Black male students at North that year, all but three qualified for free or reduced price lunch and only 10 lived in homes where English was the primary language. Somali, French, Portuguese, and Arabic accounted for most of the remainder, but five other primary languages were listed and a number of additional languages were anecdotally present in the households. Of Black boys, 33 were referred for discipline at least once, and seven received at least one suspension. Fifteen additional multi-racial male students had a Black American or African immigrant parent or grandparent. These 15 students were all U.S. born and lived in English-only households. Percentages from a group of 15 should be taken cautiously, but their rates of free and reduced lunch participation, discipline referral, and suspension were equivalent to or higher than those of Black students not guardian-identified as multi-racial.

Although membership is porous, approximately half of Black students at North in 2017-2018 participated actively in the Gentlemen, a group initiated and coordinated by the school social worker for the purposes of providing mutual support and counteracting systemic inequities, especially for boys of color. Members varied widely in terms of both academic achievement and disciplinary involvement. A small number of White, Southeast Asian, and Middle Eastern students participated, but most Gentlemen were African immigrants of first or second generation. The Gentlemen served in this needs assessment study as key informants, as did members of North's Leaders Council, a group of 12 peer-elected and *ex officio* faculty and

staff that convenes every two weeks to make community-wide procedural and policy decisions including some related to behavior management. In the 2018-2019 school year, the year in which the needs assessment study was executed, the principal also charged the Leaders Council with championing equity, specifically by vetting a series of equity workshops for the full faculty. No staff or faculty of color sat on the Leaders Council in that year.

Purpose and Questions

This needs assessment study elicited perspectives on the problem of practice from Black male students at North and of adults in North's elected and *ex officio* Leaders Council. The purpose was to consider the conceptual framework in light of key stakeholder perceptions and to determine focus factors for intervention. Two research questions guided the assessment:

RQ1: To what do faculty/staff and Black boys at North attribute discipline disparities at their school?

RQ2: What do faculty/staff and Black boys at North think could be done to help close the discipline gap?

Method

Qualitative research lends itself to exploring the sense individuals or groups make of a problem (Cresswell, 2014). This qualitative needs assessment study draws on key informant perceptions to revisit the conceptual framework as a theoretical proposition and to identify the variables and relationships students and adults appeared most primed to transform. Semi-structured group interviews allow participants to respond to and elaborate on each other's ideas and reveal collectively resonant themes and ideas (O'Leary, 2014). There is no consistent nomenclature regarding this interview format. It is more conversational than a formal individual interview and more directed than a fluid focus group (Adams, 2015). Two student group

interviews and one adult group interview took place on separate days after school.

Participants

Rather than solicit the views of every North community member or of a random sample of members, the study used purposive sampling of key informants, as described by Schutt (2015). Student members of the Gentlemen regularly contemplate and discuss issues around race, gender, and bias. They are also largely Black and disproportionately involved in the disciplinary system at North. Therefore, they are key informants regarding the problem of practice. The student sample came simply from inviting all Gentlemen to participate. I recruited Gentlemen by visiting a weekly lunch meeting of the group to describe the project and hand out parental permission and student assent forms, which were also mailed to families, in Arabic, French, Portuguese, or Somali translation as appropriate. The sample for the Gentlemen interviews consisted of one group of five and a second group of ten. Seven students were from the 6th grade, three were from the 7th grade, and five were from the 8th grade. Seven were of Somali descent, two of Sudanese descent, two of Iraqi descent, one of Angolan descent, and three of mixed racial background.

Adult members of Leaders Council represent a variety of positions and viewpoints from among the faculty and staff and carry a specific responsibility for engaging in equity work. They are also elected by peers who trust their ability to represent faculty viewpoints. They provided the adult sample. I recruited Leaders Council members by describing the project and handing out consent forms at a regular Leaders Council meeting. The sample for the Leaders Council group interview included all Leaders Council members except one teacher and one special educator, who both had consented to participate but had scheduling conflicts on the day of the interview. The sample included the principal, the teaching strategist, a school counselor, an educational

technician, and four teachers. All were White. Four were male, and four were female. Participants ranged from having four to 30 years of experience in schools.

Measures and Instrumentation

The researcher-developed needs assessment interview protocols for Gentlemen (Appendix A) and Leaders Council (Appendix B) served to explore participant perceptions of the problem of practice. The questions were designed to identify the causes and factors in the conceptual framework (Figure 1.2) that participants perceived as relevant within the context and to identify broad categories of intervention that participants perceived as potentially useful. The prompts were reviewed by an experienced qualitative researcher and revised according to feedback. Student prompts include "Think of a time when you got in trouble here. Why do you think the adult reacted the way they did? How do you think the adult might have reacted differently with a different student? Why? What could people at this school do to improve how discipline works?" Adult prompts include "Compare the behavior of White girls at North Middle School to the behavior of Black boys. If we were, as a school, to attempt to decrease the disciplinary involvement of Black boys, how might we go about it?"

Procedure

The following section describes both data collection and data analysis procedures for the needs assessment study.

Data collection. Each group interview took place in a classroom after school. Participants and I sat around a table. I welcomed and thanked the participants and read the narrative and questions from the interview protocols (Appendices A and B), using the follow-up questions or neutral prompts as necessary. The interviews were recorded then converted to text with NVivo Transcription. I typed process notes during and immediately after the interviews.

The school social worker was present as an assistant moderator during the Gentlemen interviews. The Leaders Council group interview ran over the allotted time and only included questions 1, 2, 3, and 5. All participants chose to answer each question. Question 7 was posed as an optional follow-up question in an email thanking the group for participation. Four of the eight participants answered. The Gentlemen group interviews stayed within time limit. Questions 5 and 6 for the Gentlemen were answered in responses to earlier questions so were not explicitly posed.

Data analysis. The conceptual framework (Figure 1.2) depicts three primary factors and six secondary factors, each defined in Table 2.1 in the form of a proposition, which participant responses might either endorse or call into question. After listening to the recordings and reading the transcripts and process notes, I coded the transcripts using NVivo 11. For all responses relevant to RQ1—the question probing to test the conceptual framework against participant impressions—the predetermined set of codes in Table 2.1 were used as an *a priori* analytic frame. Text that was not readily coded within that scheme was given a new code. This approach has been termed *directed content analysis* (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). For responses relevant to RQ2—addressed by the final interview question in each protocol—coding was emergent and iterative. This conventional approach to content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) allowed me to make several passes through the data to iterate a categorized list of intervention approaches suggested by the participants.

Table 2.1

Propositions that Participant Responses Might Endorse

Primary Factors	Secondary Factors
Differential behavior: Black boys violate behavioral expectations more often than peers.	*Adverse experiences*: Exposure to difficult circumstances outside of school leads to behavioral challenges at school. *Academic skills*: Academic skill deficits lead to behavioral challenges at school. *Teacher skills*: Students conform more to teacher behavioral expectations when the teacher is skilled at instruction and classroom management. *School climate*: Students of color act against school norms when the school climate is hostile or unwelcoming to them.
Differential selection: Adults are more likely to refer Black boys than peers for the same behaviors. *Differential processing*: Adults administer harsher consequences to Black boys than to peers for the same behaviors.	*Cultural difference*: Adults and students from different cultures may misinterpret each others actions. Similarly, a school's culture may treat as undesirable certain behaviors that are normative in a home or community. *Adult bias*: Adults carry implicit and explicit bias against boys or Black students.

Discussion of Findings

In one sense, the group interviews offered only a narrow window into participant perceptions compared to the much wider window I have by way of daily work and conversations with colleagues and students. A typical work day includes talking with teachers frustrated with student behaviors, talking with students frustrated with being called out for behaviors, and

making processing decisions about how to respond to behavioral issues. These kinds of everyday scenarios often spark discussion about disparities or about the sorts of primary and secondary factors under investigation in this needs assessment study. In another sense, though, the very narrowness of the group interviews and the structured aspect of their analysis allowed for new insights by letting trees resolve from the forest. It resulted in a clear sense of some prevailing perspectives on the problem of practice. The following sections discuss findings relevant to RQ1 and RQ2.

Perceptions of Origins of Discipline Disparities

To examine participant perspective on causes and factors in the problem of practice, RQ1 asked to what do participants attribute discipline disparities. Before introducing the idea of disparities, the opening questions in each protocol asked participants to broadly describe misbehavior and behavior management at North. These questions elicited generalized observations and reflections about the etiology of problematic student behavior as well as about what does and doesn't work about behavior management systems at North. In their responses, Leaders Council members cited misbehaviors such as disruption and interpersonal conflict and attributed them to hardships outside of school, desire for peer attention, natural testing of boundaries, and frustration with challenging academic work. The Gentlemen focused on common types of misbehavior such as "blurting out," "arguments and fights," "walking around the hall," and "they don't do their ALEKS[3]." Like the adult participants, they offered race-and gender-neutral explanations ("It's like people just try to be funny;" "to impress their friend;" "to make other people laugh").

[3] Online mathematics homework.

Some Leaders Council members balked at the notion of "getting in trouble," Mrs. Fontaine[4] saying that this idea "sounds old school." A recurring theme among adults was appreciation for the school's office reset system, which allows students or teachers to decide that a student needs a non-punitive ten-minute break in which I either processes with the student or give them space to calm down, then bring the student back to class and help them re-engage with their classwork. A missing piece in schoolwide behavior management systems, though, according to Ms. Martin was the opportunity to have a restorative conversation, "so when they come into class the next time I feel like it's a fresh start." She also noted that resets can be helpful but don't necessarily require the student to take ownership. "Like, 'I did this and it didn't just affect me, it affected other students, so I really need to have some ownership of my behavior.'"

Adults attributed disparities to cultural difference. The next interview questions asked participants to think explicitly about whether and why certain groups experience more discipline than others. Repeated pass-throughs of the transcript yielded 17 adult and 19 student participant statements codable under the schema in Table 2.1. For Leaders Council members, the most common class of statements identified cultural difference as an explanation for discipline disparities at North. Some of these statements focused on race-based culture differences, and others focused on gender-based cultural differences.

Race-based attributions involved the idea that teachers bring a "largely White middle class" (Mr. Jameson) set of behavioral norms and that the households of North's Black students "handle things differently… voice level and how they say things and aggressiveness in their conversations" (Mr. Abrams). Mr. Dalton used this theory to explain differential behavior: "There is a difference in some of the ways they interact that doesn't meet my norms." Ms.

[4] All names are pseudonyms.

Martin used it to explain differential selection: "It's just like loudness a lot of times brings my attention to it."

Gender-based attributions theorized that boys of any race might clash with school norms in ways that girls of any race don't. If women are, Mrs. Levin said, "the majority of the people are who are informing our systems, it's going to have implications for students who don't fit into that." As with the responses that attributed disparities to racial cultural difference, responses that attributed disparities to gender differences could be read as simultaneously explaining differential behavior and differential selection. For example, Mr. Ajans argued that, "social media is probably a bigger issue for the White girls… more subsurface behaviors, the quiet teasing… bullying stuff. …I think they're a little quieter in how they do it." Also noteworthy was that attributions to gender difference, unlike attributions to racial difference, added a biological component to the notion of cultural difference. For example, Mrs. Haskell's idea that "schools are still largely in favor of girls, who are more able to sit still and control their bodies. …Regardless of race, boys need to move more," could be seen as asserting both social and biological origins to male/female cultural differences.

Gentlemen attributed disparities to adult bias. Most of the Gentlemen responses suggested that discipline disparities stem from adult bias in selection and processing. The Gentlemen animatedly talked over each other recounting numerous times when they felt that they had been called out for behavior when female or White peers had not or times when they had been given consequences for behavior when female or White peers had not. "The girls behind me will be talking for like twenty five minutes.... [The teacher will] say one little thing and he'll be fine," noted Rohan. "But if I say one thing it'll be like silent lunch or detention." Abdullah wondered if teachers are "a little bit softer on girls than boys… because boys are

supposed to be tougher." Most explanations, though, focused on racial/ethnic/cultural bias. Rohan compared it to his experience being followed around the local pharmacy. "People are like, 'Oh, you're going to steal my money because you're Black or whatever,' So like it's just those little things that people say that they don't realize… Like we got too caught up in stereotypes now." He also recounted a teacher telling a peer with significant disciplinary involvement that his do-rag "made her feel like he was a part of a gang or something like that, and it made her uncomfortable." He observed that she might come down more harshly on that student's behavior because of that discomfort, but, "if someone that she feels comfortable around might be doing something worse, she's not really going to care that much."

Abdirashid argued that "some teachers have their own beliefs and they kind of like unknowingly, unconsciously…. They subconsciously implement in their lives. they subconsciously do it and do it even without noticing. Like the racial profiling stuff, without noticing." Rohan also believed that younger teachers might be less biased.

> There is one young teacher and she can talk to everybody.... She's equal. Everybody loves her. …With the older teachers, the way they grew up: things were a lot different. So say they grew up at an all-White school or did things with only White people and never really were around the different culture there was today in [our city]. Then it would like... It seems like they think differently.

He also raised the possibility that teachers can be afraid of appearing biased. He noted that his teachers seemed afraid to discipline the Fierce Girls (the newer, female analogue to the Gentlemen) after having been publicly called racist by the Fierce Girls in several contexts.

> Like, I'll be walking down the hall talking to someone and I'll get in trouble, but if like the Fierce Girls are yelling in the hallway, they don't really get yelled at or anything.

…I'm not saying they're afraid of them, but they're afraid of how they'll be looked at. Indeed, though the Gentlemen had often complained about adult bias since becoming a group, they had not confronted it. The Fierce Girls, however, had. In the fall of 2018, they held a forum for district and community leaders articulating their experiences of bias and their desire for more teachers of color. They also had participated in several restorative circles with administrators and teachers about disciplinary incidents they felt were influenced by bias. Generally, their position had been less conciliatory than that expressed by the Gentlemen in the group interview. Rohan offered, for example, a story of the science teacher mentioning Arnold Schwarzenegger, and one of the Fierce Girls accusing him in the middle of class of saying "the N-word." "[He] was like, 'No, no. *Schwarze*negger,' and she said, 'Well, you said that part of the word more than you were supposed to.'"

The older Gentlemen in the group interview offered complex hypotheses about the observed bias, but the younger Gentlemen were more likely to simply identify its presence. When I said something in a follow-up prompt implying that everybody might carry racial biases, myself included, the younger Gentlemen look horrified. "Wait, you're racist!?" Abdulrahim asked. Emanuel insisted, "No you're not!" Abdullah, apparently still turning the idea over in his head, interrupted a few minutes later to ask for evidence. It appeared that the journey from sixth grade to eighth grade for the Gentlemen involved, among many other changes, a deepening understanding of race and racism. This developmental difference is supported in the research literature (e.g., Spears Brown & Bigler, 2005).

Other explanations. Although Leaders Council predominately attributed discipline disparities to cultural difference and the Gentlemen to adult bias, there were other explanations offered. Mr. Ajans observed that challenging circumstances at home might lead to challenging

behaviors at school. "I wonder if at our school in particular there's a connection between tough stuff at home and the demographics of the kids. The socioeconomics, especially in our school… that's highly correlated with race." At several points in the conversation, participants also suggested that socioeconomic status seemed to them a more salient predictor of disciplinary referral than race or ethnicity—despite having been informed at a recent meeting that this was not the case at North. Mr. Tyson asked, for example, if girls from low-SES households at the school had different behavioral outcomes than girls from a wealthier neighborhood in the school attendance area. He also reflected on his recent experience teaching at an expensive preparatory school in West Africa. There, he reported, some of his students with the most problematic behaviors were being raised by nannies because their parents were often travelling or working. He made a conjecture about Black students at North, whose parents may have had 9 to 5 jobs when they lived in Africa but now have night jobs or multiple jobs. "So some of these kids are having to wake themselves up in the morning because their parents are still sleeping… where if that kid was still living in Angola or the Congo and their parents had a 9 to 5 job, I think that would be very different."

Only one comment from the Gentlemen group interviews implied a cause other than bias. When asked if certain groups of students get in trouble more than others, Hussein asked to speak.

> It's like the people that care about how their education is and what they want to be when they grow up. It's what separates people from who gets in trouble and who doesn't. Basically, like some people have at their home environment habits that are not accepted at school. So it's harder for them to stay out of trouble.

This statement was also the only student statement that supported the idea of differential behavior as a primary factor. I allowed a pause in the conversation, but no Gentlemen continued

that thread of discussion.

Overall, Leaders Council attributed discipline disparities to differential selection caused by cultural difference and the Gentlemen attributed them to differential selection and differential processing caused by adult bias against boys and against students of color. Additional factors were mentioned and could possibly have been drawn out and elaborated in a follow up interview, but it is informative to consider the explanations that came most automatically. They may indicate what type of intervention strategy could have the widest and most instinctive appeal at North.

Suggested Action Steps

To better understand participant impressions of possible paths to remediating the problem of practice, RQ2 asked what North could do differently. Accordingly, the final question in the group interview protocols guided participants to brainstorm possible improvements to North's behavior management systems given the discussion to that point. Mrs. Levin called for professional development for faculty regarding "working with students of color - how students perceive school, sense of belonging, sense of worth, history of oppression and resistance, strengths-based approaches in working with youth of color, etc." She also proposed revising curriculum ("history and accomplishments of people of color"), expanding existing supports ("GENTLEMEN!!! FIERCE GIRLS!!!"), and updating behavioral expectations to be culturally responsive. The bulk of responses, however, suggested that Leaders Council members were most interested in interventions that involved giving voice to non-dominant perspectives within the school community. Mr. Dalton suggested a need for more Black and male faculty, staff, and volunteers. They also proposed gathering more input from students and families on school policies and practices. Mr. Jameson, for example, suggested asking "African American boys (and

other subgroups) to give critical feedback on our [behavioral] expectations and discipline procedures." Mrs. Haskell said, "I think we would need to ask their parents...and I'm not being glib, but knowing that our teaching force is largely white and largely female, we're already trying to broach a cultural gap. I think getting perspective from their parents would be hugely insightful." In these proposals, Leaders Council participants reiterated the cultural difference hypothesis and communicated some cultural humility about needing diverse voices to help navigate it. Openness to that sort of input, it is important to note, is only one dimension of cultural humility, which also involves something not clearly evidenced in the Leaders Council group interview: a propensity to independently interrogate one's own biases and biased behaviors (Foronda, Baptiste, Reinholdt, & Ousman, 2016; Hook, Davis, Owen, Worthington, & Utsey, 2013).

The Gentlemen seemed surprised at first to be asked for their ideas but ended up offering a wide range of suggestions as well. Rohan suggested a community listening event echoing the Leaders Council suggestions. Emanuel and Kasim asked that the school test teachers for bias and make it part of their ongoing teacher evaluation. More popular, though, were proposals to expand the activities and role of the Gentlemen and proposals to do discipline differently. Participants asked for more Gentlemen activities and stronger communication to the community about the Gentlemen. The Gentlemen, Rohan observed, "are like your family… like the people that actually care about you as much as you care about them." Abdirashid suggested, "We should come up with a meaning of Gentlemen Club. They keep asking us, 'Who's the Gentlemen Club?'" Several students proposed relaxing the rules and giving students extra chances before getting consequences. They widely agreed that teachers and administrators should take time to listen before reacting and that this would protect against unfair punishment. For example,

Emanuel advised me to do "more extra evaluation, because usually you just go with what the teachers say but… you should talk to some students who were there and then see some more points of view." Abdirashid talked about how restoration could mitigate bias. "Try to make things better between the person that got in trouble and the teacher [because] the teacher thinks that you're a troublemaker now… and they're going to treat you differently." It was not as easy to isolate dominant response themes for RQ2 as it was for RQ1. If anything, Leaders Council could be characterized as seeking opportunities to better understand minority cultural norms and the Gentlemen could be characterized as wanting to strengthen their group and as wanting adults to slow down and broaden their responses to perceived misbehavior.

Summary and Limitations

The purpose of this needs assessment was to understand key informant perspectives related to the conceptual framework and to ascertain a direction for intervention that stakeholders might support and engage with. The two informant groups offered different interpretations of the problem of practice. Leaders Council members attributed discipline disparities largely to differential behavior and differential selection due to cultural difference, and the Gentlemen attributed them largely to differential selection and differential processing driven by adult bias. Leaders Council members showed particular interest in interventions that increased the voice of stakeholders of color, hoping they could clarify and mitigate the impact of cultural difference on differential discipline. The Gentlemen, for their part, were most interested in leveraging the Gentlemen as an intervention and in seeing adults mitigate bias by better investigating behavioral incidents and by helping restore strained student-teacher relationships. The common ground between these two perspectives is the idea that discipline disparities stem in part from differential selection and a desire to mitigate dissonance between White faculty and staff and students of

color—whether that dissonance be rooted in difference or in bias. The intervention literature review in Chapter 3 looks to the research base for an intervention that occupies that common ground.

It is important to address some limitations of the needs assessment study. First, the design suffers in credibility in that it used only one source of data (Krefting, 1991). However, dividing the interviews into two student groups and one adult group provided some degree of triangulation—if not in method, at least in instantiation. Second, the secondary factors under investigation were loosely explicated, raising concerns about construct validity (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002). This looseness, however, also mitigated the threat that a rigid conceptual framework would unduly limit the interpretation of participant responses. Third, participant ideas about experimenter expectancies or about social stigma associated with certain responses may limit candor (Adams, 2015; Shadish et al., 2002). Therefore, interview questions were revised with outside feedback several times to depersonalize the questions for adults. My process notes questioned, however, whether Leaders Council members still understated their belief in the differential behavior hypothesis because they did not want to appear regressive to me. The depersonalization of the questions may have also "let them off the hook" from confronting their own personal biases and behaviors. The school social worker was present for the student interviews so that the students would feel safer sharing their honest perceptions. A carefully selected assistant moderator can, by affinity or by relationship, lower barriers to candor (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Fourth, the research design insulated Leaders Council from the Gentlemen's perceptions. Had they heard the clarity with which the Gentlemen perceived the problem of practice to be caused by bias, they may have dug deeper to confront that likelihood. Instead, I made it safe for them to simply attribute discipline disparities to cultural differences afforded

them "plausible deniability of racism" (Hardie & Tyson, K., 2013, p. 85). Finally, limiting the assessment to one school and to the Gentlemen and the Leaders Council threatens external validity or transferability in terms of the rest of the school community and in terms of other schools (Krefting, 1991; Shadish et al., 2002). The assessment, however, purposefully sought the perspectives of the Gentlemen and the Leaders Council as key informants with the potential to inspire change within the school community. Threats to transferability to other schools are addressed through specific description of the school context. Although the study has important limitations, it does enhance understanding of the problem of practice and the conceptual framework. It can also inform the search for an intervention.

Chapter 3

Evidence-Based Approaches to Mitigating North's Discipline Gap

This research study addresses inequity in discipline for Black males at North Middle School. Chapter 1 described the problem of behavioral referral disparities as it exists at North and at schools across the United States. It also advanced a conceptual framework articulating three potential primary factors in discipline gaps—differential behavior, differential selection, and differential processing (Gregory et al., 2010; Irvin et al., 2004)—and a set of secondary factors that could give rise to each primary factor.

The needs assessment study detailed in Chapter 2 explored student and adult perceptions about the problem and its factors in the context of North, finding that Black male students, who are largely first or second-generation African immigrants—understood the problem differently than did adults in the building. Members of the Gentlemen, an affinity/support group largely for boys of color, saw the problem as stemming from gender and racial bias in selection for and processing of discipline. Members of Leaders Council, an elected and *ex officio* adult leadership group, proposed that the root of the problem might be differential selection deriving from cultural difference (e.g., a mismatch of cultural norms between the largely White female faculty and boys with African immigrant background). Secondarily, they suggested that adverse home experiences disproportionately experienced by North's students of color might cause differential behavior (e.g., stress-induced misbehavior). When asked to imagine possible interventions, Leaders Council expressed the most interest in increasing the voice of students of color and their families in shaping the behavioral management climate at North, and the Gentlemen were most interested in strengthening their group and in seeing adults be less reactive and more thoughtful in behavior management.

Framing the Selection of an Intervention

These two perspectives on the problem reveal divides and common ground. The students located responsibility in the adults, but the adults located responsibility more diffusely in cultural difference or possibly in the dynamics of poverty and immigration. The student explanation was explicitly racial. The adult explanation buried race under the proxies of culture and poverty. Although only students cited differential processing and only adults cited differential behavior, both groups perceived differential selection to be an important potential factor in discipline gaps at North. This isolates a viable starting point for student-adult collaboration on addressing the problem of practice.

The present chapter, therefore, looks to identify research-based interventions that might mitigate differential selection rooted either in cultural difference or bias. First, though, the following section examines three additional theoretical constructs that can further frame intervention in the problem of differential selection: self-serving cognitive distortion (Barriga, Landau, Stinson, Liau, & Gibbs, 2000), White fragility (DiAngelo, 2011), and minority student empowerment (Cummins, 2001).

Self-Serving Cognitive Distortion

Humans have a natural tendency to avoid or externalize blame. Cognitive behavioral therapy calls this cognitive distortion (Beck, 2011) or, more specifically, self-serving cognitive distortion (Barriga et al., 2000). Such distortions protect us from the psychic pain of not acting according to our convictions and also protect us from accountability for our actions (Bear, Manning, & Izard, 2003). These distortions can be heard every day from students sent to the office at North. "What did you expect me to do? He made me mad," is a common refrain from students, as is some variant of, "She always gets me in trouble for no reason! You can ask

anybody, I didn't do anything." Similarly, North teachers have been known in moments of stress to write individual students off as "poison," "out of control," or "a bad seed." In the heat of a conflict and its aftermath, it can be easier for both students and teachers to distort rather than to take personal accountability. Ostensibly, though, adults at schools have both the developmental maturity and professional responsibility to embrace that accountability.

Self-serving cognitive distortion has been further divided into four types: self-centered, blaming others, minimizing/mislabeling, and assuming the worst (Gibbs, Potter, & Goldstein, 1995). All four versions could come into play for students and adults alike in moments of disciplinary selection. For example, a student might be too self-centered to admit the impact of his actions on others, or a teacher might blame a student's behavior for the failure of a poorly planned activity. A student might argue that they merely tapped a peer when they actually hit them, and a teacher might assume that a student's use of strong language was meant as aggression when it was actually meant in a friendly way. Given these possibilities, neither students nor adults are necessarily reliable interpreters of behavioral conflict or of the dynamics of differential selection. Black male students at North might sometimes use accusations of racism or sexism as a way to avoid personal accountability, and teachers and administrators at North likely cite student behavior or cultural differences as a way to avoid confronting their own selection bias. The adult side of this dynamic—which is more problematic—is further elaborated by a second, related construct: White fragility (DiAngelo, 2011; DiAngelo, 2018)

White Fragility

White fragility refers to the low psychosocial stamina of White people when confronted with problems of racism (DiAngelo, 2011). This low stamina stems from the nature of White existence in our society: comfortable, segregated, insulated, entitled, positively reinforced, and

naïve. DiAngelo lists triggers that disturb that equilibrium for Whites and spur defensive maneuvers meant to restore equilibrium. The list includes five that would likely occur in the course of addressing possible differential selection at North:

- Suggesting that a White person's viewpoint comes from a racialized frame of reference (challenge to objectivity);
- people of color choosing not to protect the racial feelings of White people in regard to race (challenge to white racial expectations and need/entitlement to racial comfort);
- a fellow White not providing agreement with one's interpretations (challenge to White solidarity);
- receiving feedback that one's behavior had a racist impact (challenge to White liberalism); or
- an acknowledgment that access is unequal between racial groups (challenge to meritocracy) (p. 57).

DiAngelo argues that White people experiencing such triggers—even progressive White people—often react with defensive maneuvers such as expressing hurt that someone would implicate them in a racist dynamic, denying the role of race in the dynamic, or short-circuiting dialogue by speaking angrily, woefully, evasively, or incoherently. The White person regresses or decompensates in an attempt to restore equilibrium rather than facing the trigger honestly and critically and sitting with the discomfort. A microcosm of White fragility can be seen at North when a student of color calls a White teacher or administrator racist for correcting their behavior or disciplining them. The kneejerk reaction of an educator in that situation is often to assert, in so many words, to the student that race has nothing to do with the situation and that the educator is making a rational and racially-neutral assertion of behavioral norms and of adult authority.

Sometimes, the educator will also express dire offense to peers and supervisors that the student or parent would dare make such a hurtful and absurd accusation. Several teachers at North did just that in the 2018-2019 school year, requesting administrator support in prohibiting students from making such claims and in defending teachers against such claims from parents.

Engaging White people in discussion of bias is a delicate matter. If racism is to be discussed, Whites expect an incredible degree of indirectness and emotional safety. DiAngelo (2018) terms this expectation the *rules of engagement*:

1. Do not give me feedback on my racism under any circumstances. If you break the cardinal rule:
2. Proper tone is crucial – feedback must be given calmly. If there is any emotion in the feedback, the feedback is invalid and does not have to be considered.
3. There must be trust between us. You must trust that I am in no way racist before you can give me feedback on my racism.
4. Our relationship must be issue-free – If there are issues between us, you cannot give me feedback on racism.
5. Feedback must be given immediately, otherwise it will be discounted because it was not given sooner.
6. You must give feedback privately, regardless of whether the incident occurred in front of other people. To give feedback in front of anyone else—even those involved in the situation—is to commit a serious social transgression. The feedback is thus invalid.
7. You must be as indirect as possible. To be direct is to be insensitive and will invalidate the feedback and require repair.
8. As a white person I must feel completely safe during any discussion of race. Giving me

any feedback on my racism will cause me to feel unsafe, so you will need to rebuild my trust by never giving me feedback again. Point of clarification: when I say "safe" what I really mean is "comfortable."

9. Giving me feedback on my racial privilege invalidates the form of oppression that I experience (i.e. classism, sexism, heterosexism). We will then need to focus on how you oppressed me.
10. You must focus on my intentions, which cancel out the impact of my behavior.
11. To suggest my behavior had a racist impact is to have misunderstood me. You will need to allow me to explain until you can acknowledge that it was your misunderstanding (pp. 123-124).

Obviously, these rules are self-serving and unreasonable. In the context of North, students of color cannot be expected to be selfless, indirect, and unemotional when raising concerns about biased discipline. They are adolescents and, to the extent they raise critical concerns about bias, they are actually exhibiting a remarkable kind of maturity. Furthermore, their experiences of an undeniably biased society are valid cause for anger and hypervigilance. Nonetheless, it must be assumed that adults at North, to some degree, will enforce these rules of engagement when confronted with their own potential biases in disciplinary selection.

DiAngelo's rules of engagement also echo broader expectations educators sometimes hold about how students—regardless of race and gender—should present complaints to adults. Administrators often advise students, for example, to save their complaints until after class and to deliver them privately, politely, and calmly—all while explicitly owning their own part of the problem. In other words, there are already rules of engagement between students and adults; race only compounds them. White fragility could prevent North from fully exploring the moral

complexities of disciplinary selection in a racialized environment, even despite the fact that North faculty generally self-identify as progressive and anti-racist. Being a White anti-racist educator is far easier in the imagination than in the messy particularities of one's own practice. White people also feel trapped in a binary choice: Either they are racist or they are not, and thus any admission of racist thought or action consigns them to the "bad" camp. It would be more honest and perhaps more palatable to see that everyone's practice typically includes both racist and anti-racist actions (Kendi, 2019).

The notions of self-serving cognitive distortion and White fragility show that neither the student nor the adult perspective can tell the whole story of the problem of practice. Implicit bias, systemic racism, and *bona fide* misbehavior can all exist in the same complicated moment, and it may be difficult for all parties to admit that.

Framework for the Empowerment of Minority Students

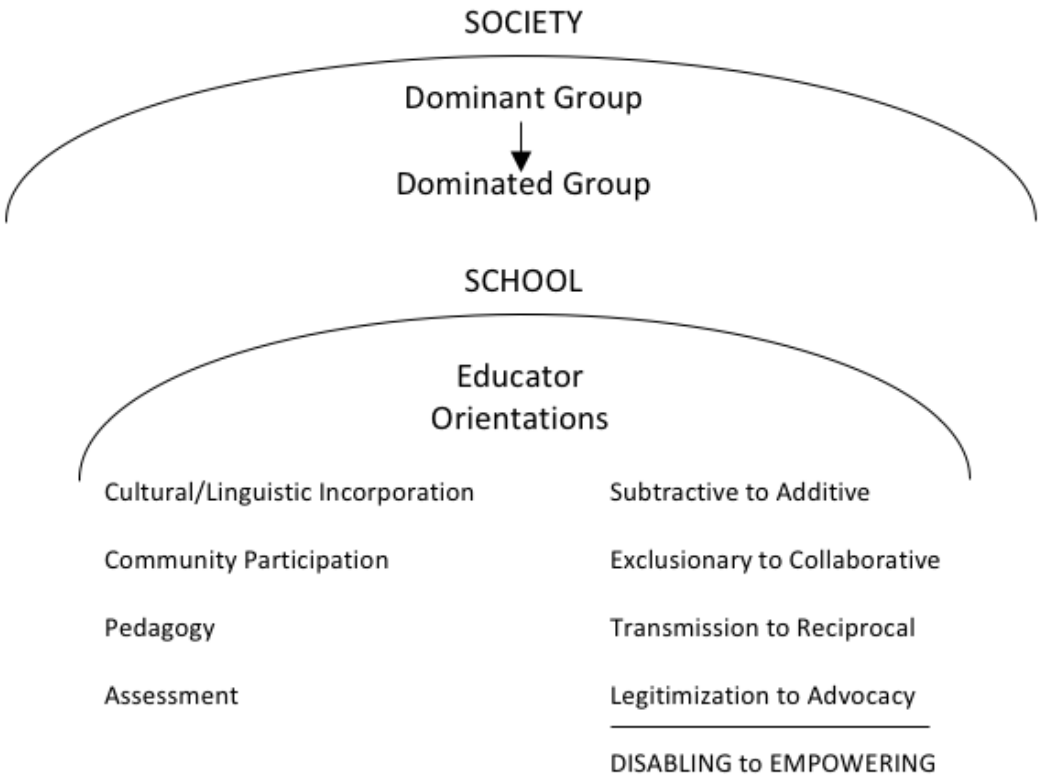
Another theoretical perspective that frames the consideration of potential interventions is Cummins' (2001) framework for the empowerment of minority students. In reflecting on the perennial failure of reforms meant to close demographic gaps in literacy outcomes, Cummins offered a sage warning: such interventions will continue to fail if they focus on instructional methods and accountability measures instead of addressing the fact that schools are embedded in and thus will naturally tend to perpetuate entrenched societal inequities. "Interactions among educators, students, and communities are never neutral; they either reinforce or challenge coercive relations of power in the wider society" (p. 652). Educators operate in roles and structures founded on power imbalance and informed by broader societal power imbalances. Therefore, educators, through their use of positional and institutional power, tend automatically to bolster broader societal imbalances. In simpler terms, an institution borne of an unequal

society will tend to reinforce inequality. Equity initiatives such as that of the present research study, therefore, should try to explicitly disrupt that recursivity.

In seeking leverage points for challenging ingrained power imbalances, Cummins' framework focuses especially on teacher-student interactions and school-community interactions. Within those interactions, the framework identifies four key spectra of educator orientations: (a) whether cultural and linguistic differences are seen as liabilities or assets, (b) whether minority communities are kept at bay or collaborated with, (c) whether pedagogy is based on teacher control or shared ownership; and (d) whether assessment is used to confirm student deficits or to identify ways to improve services. Where educators fall along these spectra speaks to whether they are reinforcing or challenging societal inequities. In Cummins' terms, it says whether educators are empowering or disabling students. Figure 3.1 depicts the framework.

Figure 3.1

Framework for the Empowerment of Minority Students (Cummins, 2001)



Note. Adapted from "HER classic reprint: Empowering minority students: A framework for intervention," by J. Cummins, 2001, *Harvard Educational Review, 71*, p. 663. Copyright 2001 by President and Fellows of Harvard College.

Using the framework for empowering minority students to ground this research study already points in certain directions for intervention. One can imagine behavior management approaches that build on cultural understanding, collaboration with community members, shared ownership with students, and advocacy. For example, empowering the Gentlemen and their families in the intervention design and execution could enhance the intervention's effectiveness This would also align with recommendations made by both the Gentlemen and Leaders Council in the needs assessment study.

Network theory (Neal, J. W. & Neal, 2013) and Irvin and colleagues' (2004) notion of

the serial stream of discipline framed description of the problem of practice in Chapters 1 and 2 and helped narrow focus to the problem of differential selection. In the present chapter, three additional constructs—self-serving cognitive distortion, White fragility, and minority student empowerment—help frame the consideration of potential interventions. They suggest that a viable short-term intervention will need to take into account the likelihood of adult resistance and the value of taking cues from the students in question and their families. In the short-term, a successful intervention ought avoid directly blaming people, ought be collaborative, and ought treat diversity of perspectives as an asset.

Potential Interventions to Mitigate Differential Selection

First, it should be acknowledged that the distinction between differential behavior, differential selection, and differential processing is not always tidy in the intervention literature. Some interventions target more than one factor and some target differential selection only indirectly. Although restorative practices, for example, show some promise in reducing referrals and suspensions (Anyon et al., 2014; González, 2015; Gregory, Clawson, Davis, & Gerewitz, 2016; Gregory et al., 2018; Schiff, 2013), they focus iconically on the issue of differential processing (Bazemore & Schiff, 2010; McCluskey et al., 2008; Bazemore & Schiff, 2010; McCluskey et al., 2008). This literature review privileges interventions that apply directly to selection, rather than to behavior or processing. The following sections specifically consider approaches to reducing racial and gender bias, to implementing culturally responsive behavioral management strategies, and to empowering Black males in the process of intervention.

Targeting Racial and Gender Bias as a Factor in Differential Selection

I have yet to hear an adult at North claim to intentionally overselect Black boys for discipline. Discrimination theory, however, identifies four types of discrimination: explicit,

subtle, profiling, and organizational (Blank, Dabady, Citro, & National Research Council, 2004). An intervention at North could target the final three categories, in which bias or prejudice (terms used somewhat interchangeably in the literature) operate implicitly (Fiske, 2017). An intervention into biased selection at North, therefore, could focus on implicit forms of discrimination.

Two related intervention literature reviews on implicit prejudice (Lai, Hoffman, & Nosek, 2013; Lai et al., 2014) found promise in interventions that break the link between prejudice and behavior by (a) blocking access to data that might trigger prejudice (e.g., not making race of job applicants known to reviewers) or by (b) providing structures for less biased decision making (e.g., a scoring guide). In the school setting, it is impossible to block knowledge of gender and race when adults are making discipline selection decisions. However, it is feasible to provide bias-neutralizing structures such as scripts, prejudice habit-breaking training, and threat assessment protocols.

Scripts. Simple scripts, for example, have been shown to support less-biased decision making. Predominantly White undergraduates playing a law enforcement shooter simulation exhibited implicit racial bias in rapid target selection, which was reduced by prerehearsing scripts such as "If I see a person, I will ignore his race!" or "If I see a person with a gun, I will shoot! If I see a person with an object, I will not shoot!" (Mendoza, Gollwitzer, & Amodio, 2010, pp. 515, 518). The first script aimed to minimize attention to goal-irrelevant details, and the second script aimed to direct attention to goal relevant details. Without increasing deliberation time, both scripts reduced the number of times a player selected an unarmed Black target. This finding is relevant to school discipline. McIntosh, K., Girvan, Horner, and Smolkowski (2014) theorized that disproportional discipline is best explained by the interaction

of racial bias and decision scenarios; in certain scenarios, such as those when an adult is fatigued or overwhelmed and feels pressure to respond quickly, bias may have a greater influence on disciplinary decisions. McIntosh, K. et al. argued that Mendoza and colleagues' work highlights a promising line of research on potential implicit bias neutralization strategies for educators making disciplinary decisions under stress.

Along the same lines, a "STOP" script was one component of a training intervention at three urban elementary schools under federal and state oversight for stark discipline disparities (Cook et al., 2018). The script aimed to interrupt differential selection by increasing self-regulation in response to problem behaviors. It reminded teachers to (a) pause before responding, (b) take a breath, (c) notice one's first impulses, and (d) proceed positively. Pre and post measures showed that the overall intervention effected a two-thirds reduction in office referrals for Black males. Mendoza et al. (2010) apply the script strategy to reduce bias in swift, undeliberated decisions, and Cook et al. (2018) show that it can also reduce bias by increasing deliberation time.

Prejudice habit-breaking. A related but more comprehensive model for actively reducing implicit bias is the *prejudice habit-breaking intervention*, which trains participants about implicit bias, teaches them five bias-reduction strategies (Table 3.1), and requires them to log and reflect on their use of the strategies (Devine et al., 2017). To evaluate the intervention's effectiveness, it was applied to race bias with 91 predominantly White undergraduate students (Devine, Forscher, Austin, & Cox, 2012) and, in a second study, to gender bias in workshops with faculty from most of the science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and medicine departments at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (Devine et al., 2017). In both studies, participants received an assessment of their tendencies toward implicit bias and an orientation to

the phenomenon of implicit bias. They then examined case studies to see the impact of implicit bias. Next, they were taught the five evidence-based strategies for counteracting bias, including increasing personal contact with marginalized groups and imagining counter-examples to stereotypes. Finally, they were encouraged to use the strategies and made an explicit commitment to do so.

Table 3.1

Evidence-based Strategies for Counteracting Implicit Bias (Devine et al., 2012)

Strategy	Summary
Stereotype Replacement	Recognize stereotyped response. Consciously replace with unbiased response.
Counter-stereotypic Imaging	Imagining counterexamples to stereotypes.
Individuation	Learning about individuals within stereotyped group.
Perspective Taking	Imagining the perspective of the victim of stereotype.
Increasing Contact Opportunity	Working and socializing with members of out groups.

Using a General Linear Model, Devine et al. (2012) saw a reduction in implicit race bias scores of participants compared to control students. The result persisted in a follow-up assessment a month later. The second study saw a reduction in gender bias in hiring for each department between two years before and two years after the intervention (Devine et al., 2017). Using Linear Generalized Mixed Effects Models, they found that treatment departments hired 18 percentage points more women after the intervention, while control departments remained flat. The significance level of this finding was .07, but the authors contended that the number of possible departmental clusters limited the statistical power of the analysis and that the practical outcomes show that the intervention has promise. A separate analysis of the intervention also

found evidence of several other positive impacts of the intervention on gender climate in the departments, including comfort of fit and self-efficacy related to reducing gender bias (Carnes et al., 2015).

Similar principles have been applied to middle and high school environments. Some hypothesize that stereotypes are recursively magnified by the disciplinary interactions of teachers and Black boys. In one experiment, for example, 137 new sixth graders were given two brief lessons designed to ease their worries about school belonging by showing them examples of older peers who felt out of place at first but later overcame those insecurities. It was hypothesized that this would create a break in any stereotype feedback loops between the students and their teachers. Indeed, it resulted in large reductions in disciplinary referrals for Black boys through the end of high school, nearly eliminating the discipline gap between White and Black boys. A second experiment in the same study replicated the initial results with a larger sample (Goyer et al., 2019).

Threat assessment. Another strategy, threat assessment, involves the use of team protocols to assess the seriousness of threats and to take steps to resolve the precipitating conditions. Threat assessment was developed as an alternative to post-Columbine zero tolerance policies, which have been linked with increased discipline disparities (Cornell & Lovegrove, 2015; Hoffman, 2014). Cornell and Lovegrove (2013) synthesized studies showing that the state-mandated use of threat assessment guidelines in Virginia schools reduced problematic behaviors, reduced exclusion, and reduced discipline disparities. They performed their own secondary analysis of the data and found that, although White and Black students benefitted equally, implementation led to a 19% reduction in long-term suspensions and 8% decrease in short-term suspensions. Threat assessment can be seen as a way to mitigate differential processing, but it

also helps adults select whether an incident requires selection for disciplary intervention at all.

In summary, it appears that there are potential evidence-based tools for mitigating implicit and structural bias, and that there are ways to apply some of those tools to the problem of differential selection in school discipline. However, the frames of self-serving cognitive distortion, White fragility, and minority student empowerment leave concerns in the short-term about the reaction of adults to these tools. Because the tools assert that adults may be differentially selecting for discipline because of bias, North adults may resist or co-opt the tools. One ethnography of schools engaged in anti-bias training, for example, documented how White teachers absorbed and then reframed the training. Rather than increasing their empathy, awareness of bias led teachers to reframe the problem as that of bias against Whites (Vaught & Castagno, 2008). In a short-term intervention at North, such a backlash could be anticipated. In the needs assessment study, North adults appeared more prepared to accept an intervention that presumed cultural difference to be the root of differential selection and did not target their own gender and racial biases.

Targeting Cultural Difference as a Factor in Differential Selection

Scholars frequently identify cultural difference as an important factor in demographically disparate student outcomes (Delpit, 2006; Gay, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Nieto, 2000). Cultural difference has further been linked specifically to discipline disparities and proposed as a frame for mitigating them (Monroe, 2005). Mitigation could be as simple as eliminating school rules that serve no purpose save to assert dominant cultural norms or as complex as integrating the social and cultural norms of Black students and families into behavioral expectations (Townsend, 2000). This sort of mitigation strategy has been called cultural synchronization (Irvine, 1990) and has been identified as a tool for creating culturally responsive systems

(Monroe & Obidah, 2004). The following sections consider two related versions of the strategy: culturally responsive classroom management (CRCM) and culturally responsive positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS).

Culturally responsive classroom management. There exists a rich base of literature regarding culturally responsive teaching, a pedagogy that takes diverse cultural traditions and norms into account in the design and execution of learning experiences (Brown, 2003; Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Although the professed aim of culturally responsive teaching is to improve learning outcomes, self-report and observation data from 274 elementary and middle school classrooms showed that culturally responsive teaching practices also had a significant positive impact on student behavioral outomes (Larson et al., 2018). One qualitative comparison of four classrooms noted that the teachers who had trained in schools with large Black populations were more likely to use culturally relevant discipline strategies (Monroe, 2012).

The literature on classroom management, however, typically ignores issues of cultural diversity, and the literature on multicultural education often has little to say about classroom management (Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, & Curran, 2004). Advocates of CRCM attempt to fill this gap by providing guidance on how to take cultural diversity into account in designing behavioral expectations and procedures (Weinstein, Curran, & Tomlinson-Clarke, 2003). The CRCM approach includes recognizing the White middle-class cultural norms embedded in many school behavioral expectations, developing nuanced familiarity with student cultural backgrounds, and being clear among teachers and with students when intentionally preferring either dominant or non-dominant cultural norms (Bondy, Ross, Gallingane, & Hambacher, 2007; Gay, 2006; Weinstein et al., 2004).

At this time, however, CRCM is largely a theoretical model without clear operationalization or empirical testing (Patish, 2016). Five studies have used interviews with and observations of teachers to begin cataloguing the beliefs and practices that might characterize CRCM in the field. One researcher interviewed but did not observe 13 urban teachers from around the country recommended by colleagues as exemplars of culturally responsive classroom managers, distilling from those interviews three principles of practice: (a) showing interest in each student, (b) asserting clear expectations, and (c) incorporating students' enculturated communication styles (Brown, 2003). An extended set of observations of another teacher with a reputation for meeting the needs of Black students yielded two culturally specific approaches to discipline: cultural humor and demonstrations of emotion and affect (Monroe & Obidah, 2004). A third study combining interviews and observations suggested that three novice teachers created safe and productive environments for Black students by (a) developing relationships, (b) establishing expectations, (c) holding students accountable, and (d) communicating in culturally responsive ways (Bondy et al., 2007). An even more robust examination of two principal-recommended middle school teachers derived a six-point schema for culturally responsive classroom management from observations, interviews, peer interviews, and document and artifact review (Milner & Tenore, 2010), and a similar examination of two high-reputation high school teachers suggested the importance of high expectations coupled with caring and humor (Adkins-Coleman, 2010). These studies indicate a nascent field seeking both conceptual clarity and differentiation from universal best practices.

One research team has designed a CRCM teacher self-efficacy scale and completed a study to validate the instrument as a measure of the construct as the team operationalized it (Siwatu, Putman, Starker-Glass, & Lewis, 2017). No studies to date, however, have

experimentally tested the impact of a CRCM protocol on student outcomes, much less on differential selection on the part of teachers. The literature on PBIS, in contrast, includes clearer consensus on operationalization and stronger empirical vetting, both generally and in relation to cultural responsiveness.

Culturally responsive positive behavioral interventions and supports. PBIS is a tiered framework for behavioral interventions and supports designed to shift a school from a reactive to a proactive behavior management climate. Key features include a building leadership team that makes data-driven decisions, a system of clearly taught expectations, and predictable ways of addressing non-desired behaviors (Sugai & Horner, 2009). PBIS has been shown at all grade levels to reduce disciplinary referrals and the need for secondary and tertiary supports (Bohanon et al., 2006; Bradshaw, Waasdorp, & Leaf, 2012; Scott, 2001).

In theory, PBIS could help reduce disparities in discipline by (a) clearly teaching expectations that may otherwise be culturally opaque for some students, (b) using clear procedures and systems that leave less room for biased decision making, and (c) setting a positive, proactive tone that allows all students to identify as valued members of the community, even when they do not meet expectations (Delpit, 2006; Green, et al., 2015; Tobin & Vincent, 2011). Most studies, though, have found that PBIS reduces referrals and suspensions but does not close discipline gaps (Bradshaw, Waasdorp, & Leaf, 2015). Vincent, Spraque, and Gau (2013), for example, analyzed discipline data for 35 Oregon middle schools over three years. About half of the schools had implemented PBIS and were receiving ongoing outside support to bolster implementation. The other half had only received an introductory training and were on a wait list for implementation support. Fidelity assessments found that the first group was indeed implementing core features of PBIS while the second group was not. Further, descriptive data

showed that the PBIS-implementing schools had far fewer suspensions generally, but similar race-based gaps in suspension as the wait list schools.

Similarly, Scott (2001) served as the outside PBIS consultant for one low-performing elementary school in Kentucky, documenting that one-year of PBIS implementation resulted in dramatically reduced exclusionary referrals for all students, minority or not. Review of secondary data from PBIS's online discipline referral logging system, School Wide Information System (SWIS; May et al., 2019), showed 69 participating elementary schools that logged ethnic/racial data and had at least a 10% decrease in discipline referrals during a three-year window. Reduction rates were found to hold across all gender and ethnic/racial groups, resulting in negligible reductions in disproportionality (Vincent, Cartledge, May, & Tobin, 2009). Another study of national SWIS data coupled with self-report PBIS fidelity data involving 77 elementary and secondary schools with reductions in exclusionary discipline during a two-year window showed that White students were experiencing the largest reduction in exclusionary consequences (Vincent & Tobin, 2011). All four of these studies conclude by calling for research into culturally responsive approaches to PBIS.

That PBIS does not typically close discipline gaps may be explained by the fact that PBIS focuses on identifying, communicating, teaching, and reinforcing a clear set of behavioral expectations. This could, by default, serve to impose teacher cultural norms onto students—norms from a culturally insulated and encapsulated worldview (Banks, J. A., 2015; Wilson, 2015). Lustick (2017) calls for incorporating culturally relevant practices into positive discipline. PBIS, for example, could be intentionally aligned with the cultural norms of a student population (Banks, T. & Obiakor, 2015; Klingner et al., 2005; McIntosh, K., Moniz, Craft, Golby, & Steinwand-Deschambeault, 2014). In fact, one study names culturally responsive PBIS—where

core behavioral expectations were rooted in Indigenous values—as a possible explanation for its finding of no significant discipline disparities between White and Indigenous students in five rural Canadian schools with high fidelity scores for PBIS implementation (Greflund, McIntosh, K., Mercer, & May, 2014). The study sought to determine whether or not Indigenous students were more likely than White peers to be referred for discipline or suspension in these schools and whether they received harsher consequences or were referred more often for subjective behaviors. Analysis of the schools' SWIS data showed no significant difference between White and indigenous students in any of those dimensions. The authors offer as one possible explanation evidence that the schools had actively engaged the indigenous community in implementing PBIS in a culturally responsive manner. More obliquely, an intervention that augmented PBIS with, among other things, training in teacher sensitivity to students' culture dramatically reduced office discipline referrals for Black students in particular (Bradshaw et al., 2018).

One avenue to tuning PBIS to diverse cultural norms would be cross-cultural immersion or contact for teachers (Monroe, 2005). Although there is no specific literature base on this, it has been proposed at times at North to use faculty professional development time to send teachers out into the mosques, churches, shops, and community centers of the school's various cultural constituencies in order to raise faculty understanding of student and family cultures. It would be important, though, to construct such opportunities in manner respectful to the hosts, lest it be a form of privileged tourism. Another path to culturally tuning PBIS—one in keeping with Cummins' framework for the empowerment of minority students (2001)—would be to integrate student and family input into policies, as was suggested by the adults in the needs assessment study. Students and families are among those stakeholders with whom a PBIS

leadership team is suggested to dialogue periodically (Baker & Ryan, 2014; McIntosh, K., & Goodman, 2016). However, North does not have a system for this input. In fact, there is little in the way of concrete guidance or research on how that should work (T. Lewis, personal communication, November 13, 2017), and the national PBIS technical assistance center has convened a working group to address this gap in the literature (J. Freeman, personal communication, October 31, 2017). Intervention research at North could help fill it.

Empowering Minority Students and Families in an Intervention

Student and family input are seen as levers for increasing student engagement in school, especially with populations that feel marginalized in educational settings (Smyth, 2006; Wentzel & Wigfield, 1998). Input can range from informal to formal and from simple to complex. On the simple end of the spectrum, school staff solicits stakeholder opinion; on the complex end, staff collaborates with students and families, shares decision-making power with them, or is even enlisted into student-driven initiatives (Fielding, 2011a, 2011b; Hart, 2008; Shier, 2001).

Informal, simple approaches to fostering input have the benefit of authenticity and spontaneity. For instance, three Australian schools employed a program of deliberately informal community events (such as meals) to create space for social interaction and to help school community members to learn about each other; as a result, student sense of belonging scores increased (Rowe & Stewart, 2011). Passive space for student and family voice, however, could lack sufficient structures for discussing sensitive issues in a safe and honest manner and might also lack a system for capturing and following through on input (Mockler & Groundwater-Smith, 2015). Because discrimination and behavior management are sensitive issues, and because one goal of this study is to make concrete changes, a more deliberate approach may be in order.

The semi-structured group interviews described in Chapter 2 exemplify a more active

solicitation of input, but one that still has limits. Mockler and Groundwater-Smith (2015) argue that engaging stakeholder voice differs fundamentally from querying stakeholders to identify their perceptions. A student survey, for example, makes students the objects of study and allows the researcher to consciously or unconsciously guide or co-opt the process to confirm or advance an adult agenda. Truly cultivating student input requires more than just posing questions to students; it means allowing students to shape the conversation, thus improving the validity of the feedback and the impact of action-based follow-up. Equalized dialogue between students, families, and staff might increase the likelihood that all perspectives are engaged and inform each other and may set the stage for better policy decisions.

In one case study, Mitra (2003) performed over 100 interviews and 100 observations over the two and a half years of a grant-funded reform initiative at a low-performing California high school with a demographic profile similar to North's. The effort used student focus groups as its starting point and ultimately spawned a student-driven reform group. That group facilitated activities in which teachers encountered student perspectives and—this is key—complementary activities in which students encountered teacher perspectives. Along the way, students helped select textbooks, helped redesign assessments, took teachers on neighborhood tours, and participated in faculty professional development as both leaders and observers. A narrative synthesis of the interviews and observations completed during the two and a half year period found that the two-way process gave participating students three meaningful avenues for participation in the school's reform effort: (a) they served as experts on the experience of the learner; (b) they served as interpreters, translating teacher's language into something students could relate to and vice versa; and (c) their presence in reform-related meetings kept adults focused on the purpose of the work and made it uncomfortable for adults to act unprofessionally.

Mitra also surmised four conditions that were key to making the student-adult dialogue successful: (a) activities that do not directly attack a teacher's practice, (b) protecting the dialogue from external or bureaucratic threats, (c) building bridges with teachers in the school, and (d) supporting the adult advisors.

A subsequent, larger study examined 13 grant-funded student-voice initiatives at high schools in northern California. Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured telephone interviews with two to five participants in each initiative, document review, and observations of mandatory meetings that brought the groups together. Open, iterative coding of transcripts and documents, informed by literature review, identified three additional characteristics of successful initiatives: (a) explicit work on developing equitable youth-adult relationships, (b) validating the work through visible victories, and (c) allocating sufficient time to the work (Mitra, 2009).

Perhaps more instructive is a case study involving a youth-driven initiative targeting shockingly high rates of suspension for males of color at one urban high school in California (Day-Vines & Terriquez, 2008). Student participants in a youth empowerment and violence-prevention initiative there raised concerns about differential selection and, with the help of adult allies, began investigating statistics and perceptions about the issue. This triggered the formation of a school discipline committee composed of youth, staff, parents, and community representatives. The committee undertook a series of interventions including a community survey, clarification of school rules, lunchtime workshops for students concerned about unfair treatment, a faculty in-service in which students and staff taught each other about positive behavior management strategies, and targeted coaching from administration for faculty with high referral counts. Although not a true experiment and, although the case study methodology was not described, the initiative corresponded with a 75% reduction in suspensions. It also provides

an exemplar of an intervention that was collaborative, well-received, and empowering.

Designing an Intervention for North

The needs assessment in Chapter 2 asked students and staff to imagine possible interventions into discipline disparities at North. The Gentlemen expressed interest in measures to mitigate adults' racial and gender bias in selection. For instance, they suggested that adults could evaluate behavioral scenarios more fully and objectively. One evidence-based means to that end could be training on implicit bias and on scripts or protocols to interrupt that bias (Cook et al., 2018; Cornell & Lovegrove, 2015; Devine et al., 2012; Devine et al., 2017; Mendoza et al., 2010). Although such interventions have a promising research base, Leaders Council did not advance adult bias as an explanation for discipline gaps, indicating that adults at North might not believe such an intervention is necessary. Furthermore, the theoretical frame of White fragility (DiAngelo, 2011) predicts short-term challenges with interventions that directly call into question adult judgement in matters involving race. They should be part of the long-term strategy, but a near-term tactic of culturally synchronizing behavioral expectations and procedures resonates with the Gentlemen's other proposal that their group augment its activities and define itself more clearly to the community. It also resonates with the Leaders Council proposal to learn from minority stakeholders how behavior management systems could be more culturally responsive. Finally, it offers a path for empowering minority voices (Cummins, 2001).

North has used PBIS as its behavior management framework since 2013 but, as of summer 2019, had made no efforts to culturally synchronize PBIS expectations or procedures, nor had it involved parents or students in any significant way to shape those expectations and procedures. Existing literature on PBIS shows that its application has not helped close discipline gaps but hypothesizes that it could if minority voices played a larger role in establishing the

norms and procedures (Bradshaw et al., 2018; Greflund et al., 2014; McIntosh, K. et al., 2011; Wilson, 2015). North is an interesting location to attempt such a project given its established use of PBIS and given the diversity of cultures represented among its students and families.

I decided that my intervention should help Gentlemen play a leadership role in an intervention that brings stakeholders together to refine or augment existing PBIS structures, making them more culturally responsive. One possible approach was to include Gentlemen and their families in PBIS planning sessions in the fall and in monthly PBIS Team meetings during the school year. This process could feel abstract and bureaucratic, however, especially to the Gentlemen. A potentially more inspiring path seemed to be for the Gentlemen to define their own culturally specific behavioral norms with the help of their families and other adult allies. As Abdirashid said in the group interview, "We should come up with a meaning of Gentlemen Club. They keep asking us, 'Who's the Gentlemen Club?'"

Anecdotal evidence suggested that North faculty and staff could be inspired by such a project as well. In March, 2019, North's Liason Committee, a union-sanctioned vehicle for bringing teacher concerns to administration, requested a review of tardy policies. In the ensuing discussions, it became clear that much of the concern had to do with a perception that the Gentlemen and the Fierce Girls had been chronically coming late to class and would accuse teachers of racism if called out on it. The Liason Committee reported that some teachers had decided not to bother anymore with holding students of color to behavioral expectations, for fear of getting shamed for it. "They're not really being gentlemen," was an occasional adult pronouncement that also evinced a desire to define Gentlemenly behavior. Furthermore, I completed a series of interviews with the Gentlemen in May, 2019, editing them into a short video that made apparent the most common ways in which the Gentlemen described themselves:

Namely, that they work hard, that they support each other when they get in trouble, that they play basketball to connect, and that the group helps them be their best selves. The video was well received by the Gentlemen and the school community, and showed the potential for North stakeholders to embrace an authentic statement of group behavioral norms for the Gentlemen.

Anecdotal evidence also indicated that the families of the Gentlemen might desire a voice in defining school-based behavioral norms for their sons. In April, 2019, North hosted an input forum for multilingual parents. The forum was facilitated by a local non-profit that focuses on empowering multilingual parents as advocates for their children's education. The model rejects a deficit conception of marginalized families and instead treats families as experts and partners (Ishimaru, 2014). Two dozen parents attended, representing a range of African backgrounds although no Middle Eastern or Latin American backgrounds. The lead facilitator was a city councilor, former school board member, and former North parent of Ghanaian birth. The guiding question for the event was *What do parents need from the school to help their kids to be successful in school and beyond?* Overwhelmingly, parents urged the school to hold their children to higher behavioral and academic expectations and to keep in closer communication with them in order to partner on that accountability (E. Fineman, personal communication, April 6, 2019). Notably in this event, no parents raised concern about excessive or biased discipline. In fact, their primary concern appeared to be that faculty and staff were too friendly with and indulgent of their children—an interesting instantiation of the cultural difference hypothesis.

For me, the Gentlemen's desire to define themselves to the community as well as faculty and multilingual parents' interest in clearer standards converged to point toward a cultural synchronization exercise that would culminate in a clear self-definition for Gentlemen including behavioral commitments—a *Gentlemen's Code*. Such a code, I hoped, could serve as a

microcosm of what a culturally responsive PBIS system at North might look like. I imagined the Gentlemen defining themselves by specific culturally-appropriate academic and social behaviors that might differ slightly from the schoolwide behavioral expectations. Theirs could be a code that defined a culturally responsive common ground between the Gentlemen, their families, and their teachers and administrators in the arena of behavioral expectations, thereby potentially moderating differential selection. I thought that this intervention approach might also circumvent White fragility (DiAngelo, 2011) and empower minority student and family voices (Cummins, 2001). Therefore, I selected the development and institution of a Gentlemen's Code as the experimental intervention for this research study.

Beginning in the first weeks of the 2019-2020 school year, the Gentlemen worked with facilitators to brainstorm possible elements of a Gentlemen's Code. They then invited parents/guardians and other adult allies to a dinner, where the guests had a chance to learn about the group and add input to the draft code. In October, 2019, the Gentlemen finalized their code and debuted it to the school community as a substructure within schoolwide PBIS, providing periodic boosters in the form of short videos about the code. Evaluation of process emphasized Cummins' (2001) framework for the empowerment of minority students and Mitra's (2003, 2009) conditions for successful student-adult collaborations. Outcome evaluation sought both qualitative and quantitative evidence of changes in perceptions and self-perceptions about the Gentlemen, as well as of shifts in disciplinary referrals. The intervention and its evaluation are detailed in the remaining two chapters.

Chapter 4

Intervention Procedure and Program Evaluation Methodology

This research study attempted to intervene in the overrepresentation of Black males in school discipline at North Middle School. Previous chapters established the problem of practice, possible causes and factors, stakeholder perceptions of the problem, and relevant evidence-based interventions. Chapter 3 concluded by outlining an intervention in which Gentlemen, their families, and school staff collaborated to articulate a set of commitments that define a Gentleman—a Gentlemen's Code.

The present chapter further describes that intervention and presents the research design used to evaluate implementation process and intervention outcomes. The design tested a theory of treatment that the proposed intervention would generate culturally responsive behavioral expectations for the Gentlemen, improve perceptions and self-perceptions of the Gentlemen, mitigate cultural difference and racial and gender bias, and ultimately reduce the selection of Gentlemen for disciplinary referral.

Research Design

Implicit here is a social change agenda, which has implications for the research design. A study's methodology ought to be informed not only by the nature of the research questions but also by the motivation behind the project (Newman et al., 2003). The present research study's line of inquiry aspired ultimately to alleviate persistent, socially-informed inequities in discipline. Hence, it attempted a transformative approach, which melds philosophy and method. According to Mertens (2007), transformative research seeks to articulate and remedy injustices and inequalities and, as such, takes conceptual and methodological measures to guard against its own potential to reinscribe the viewpoints and interests of those with power. The intervention

itself targeted an injustice. Protective measures against reinforcing that injustice in the course of study were particularly important, since the researcher and most of the faculty and staff at North are White, middle class, and well-served by the status quo of existing school structures.

Mertens (2007) further argues that the transformative approach has particular affinity with mixed methods research design. Mixed methods design allows for quantitative clarity but also qualitative paths through which traditionally marginalized voices can call into question the assumptions of the researcher and inform the direction of the research. Hence, drawing from Cummins' (2001) framework for the empowerment of minority students, the research design sought to incorporate cultural/linguistic diversity as an asset, to invite community participation, to empower minority students and families as agents, and to provide an advocacy venue for their needs. Both the intervention and the evaluation procedures were designed to empower minority voices.

I conducted the research in my own professional setting and on my own professional purvue within that setting, so the overall data collection strategy for the study could be understood as participant observation (Howell, 1972). I am not a Black male student, but I have rapport and frequent interaction with the Gentlemen and am the lead disciplinarian at North. In the parlance of network theory (Neal, J. W. & Neal, 2013), I am a key node in the settings of study.

Trustworthiness in both process and outcome evaluation was enhanced by techniques described by Krefting (1991): (a) reflexivity through keeping and reviewing field notes, (b) triangulation through using multiple data sources, (c) modified member checking through having the school social worker review transcripts for accuracy, (d) peer examination through discussing process and findings with the dissertation advisor—an experienced mixed methods researcher—

and (e) dense narrative description of the process of intervention implementation in Chapter 5.

Process Evaluation

Process evaluation examines how the implementation of an intervention unfolds. This allows a researcher to check for fidelity against models, capture on-the-ground subtleties, and inform outcome evaluation and future implementation (Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman, 2004; Saunders, 2015). The process evaluation design for this research study is organized around three research questions.

PRQ1: How were various stakeholders involved in the process?

PRQ2: What qualities of the student-adult collaboration did participants experience as useful?

PRQ3: In what ways did the intervention process empower Black boys?

Process evaluation used quantitative and qualitative data concurrently. Rather than emphasizing generic measures of implementation fidelity such as dose, adherence, and responsiveness (Dusenbury, Brannigan, Falco, & Hansen, 2003), it focused on participant experiences and perceptions of the intervention process, especially regarding depth and quality of empowerment and collaboration. Drawing on the review of theory and empirical evidence from previous chapters, it used Cummins' (2001) framework for empowerment of minority students and Mitra's (2003, 2009) conditions for success in student-adult collaboration as *a priori* frames for assessing quality implementation. Researcher field notes and group interviews served to further isolate helpful and unhelpful aspects of the intervention process and, more specifically, those aspects that empowered minority voices.

Outcome Evaluation

The outcome evaluation used mixed methods to assess many of the short-, medium-, and

long-term outcomes hypothesized in the logic model (Appendix C). Five research questions organized the outcome evaluation.

ORQ1: In what ways does the Gentlemen's Code reflect greater sensitivity to cultural relevance than existing behavioral expectations?

ORQ2: In what contexts and for what purposes was the Gentlemen's Code referenced by stakeholders during Trimester 2?

ORQ3: In what ways did Gentlemen self-perception change during the intervention?

ORQ4: In what ways did faculty/staff perception of the Gentlemen change during the intervention?

ORQ5: Did the number of discipline referrals for Gentlemen differ between first trimester and second trimester of 2019-2020 or between second trimester 2018-2019 and second trimester 2019-2020?

Outcome evaluation utilized a quasi-experimental convergent parallel mixed methods approach (Cresswell, 2014; Shadish et al., 2002). Implementation was described both quantitatively and qualitatively, and the results were interpreted together. ORQ1 and ORQ2 were explored with focus groups and group interviews. ORQ3 and ORQ4 were explored in pre/post surveys and in the group interviews. ORQ5 was explored by comparing discipline referrals for Gentlemen in the treatment trimester to two comparison trimesters.

The logic model for the intervention (Appendix C) depicts the anticipated relationships between intervention inputs, activities, and outcomes. The model hypothesizes three stages of outcome. Short-term outcomes include the Code itself—which was intended to be culturally responsive and the product of student and family empowerment—and recurring reference to the Code within the normal daily functioning of the school community. Hypothesized medium-term

outcomes included increased cultural responsiveness of North's PBIS systems, a stronger self-image for the Gentlemen, and a stronger reputation for them among faculty and staff. Long-term outcomes were anticipated to include a reduction in disciplinary referrals for Gentlemen.

Method

This section describes the participants, the evaluation instruments, and the procedures for recruitment, intervention, data collection, and data analysis. For a summary view, see the logic model (Appendix C) and the summary research matrix (Appendix D).

Participants

The intervention involved a wide variety of stakeholders across its implementation and evaluation stages. Participation is described and analyzed in greater detail in Chapter 5 in answer to PRQ1, which considers stakeholder involvement. For the purposes of this section, however, participants can be categorized in three main groups: Gentlemen, guests, and faculty and staff. Table 4.1 details each group of participants by race/ethnicity. North's district racial/ethnic categories do not include Arab as an option, so North's Iraqi immigrant families self-report as White. However, as will be described in Chapter 5, distinguishing Arab from White participants is relevant to the question of racial/ethnic discipline disparities at North. Accordingly, Table 4.1 includes that distinction.

Table 4.1

Participants by Race/ethnicity

Participant Type	Black	Hispanic	Arab	White	Multi-racial	**Total**
Gentlemen	12		1	4	1	**18**
Guests	6	1	2	2	1	**12**
Faculty & Staff	5[a]			43[a]		**48**

[a] *This is an estimate of the racial/ethnic breakdown among the anonymous faculty and staff participants in the*

pre/postintervention surveys.

The Gentlemen. The Gentlemen is an affinity and mutual support group for male students at North. It is composed largely of students of color. There are no explicit criteria for participation. New members are recruited by the school social worker and by existing members. During the intervention period, the Gentlemen included 60 boys, 44 of whom were Black, four were Arab, four were White, four were Latino, and four were multiracial. Forty-five of the Gentlemen lived in multilingual homes with the most common languages being Portuguese, French, Lingala, Arabic, and Somali. Eighteen Gentlemen volunteered to participate in the study by providing consent/assent, although all were involved in it because of its schoolwide nature. Consent and assent were not required for attendance at some of the intervention activities, but they were required for student-derived data to be used in the evaluation. Forty-nine of the 60 Gentlemen took part in at least one intervention activity.

Guests. Two Gentlemen alumni facilitators supported intervention activities. They were both Somali-American ninth graders and had been part of the founding cohort of the Gentlemen. A community volunteer facilitator also helped facilitate. He is an adult Black male who had, under the auspices of two different local non-profits, facilitated prior work with the Gentlemen and was well-liked by the Gentlemen. Finally, 17 additional family members and other perceived allies—such as teachers and community leaders—participated in a dinner activity to review and comment on a draft Gentlemen's Code. Of these dinner guests, 10 were participants in this study.

Faculty and staff. Two faculty members and the school social worker were participants in the dinner and input session and the adult group interview. Carefully selected assistant moderators have been suggested for participant comfort in qualitative research (Krueger & Casey, 2015), and the school social worker served in this capacity at many of the intervention

and evaluation activities. Additionally, of the 70 North faculty and staff, 48 participated in a preintervention and 43 in a postintervention survey about perceptions of the Gentlemen.

Instruments

As mixed methods research, this study used both quantitative and qualitative instruments to gather information for both the process and outcome evaluations.

Attendance spreadsheet. An attendance spreadsheet (Appendix E) documented time spent in each intervention activity by each participant, allowing analysis of participation rate and total hours by participant group. The first construct, also called *reach* (Linnan & Stickler, 2002), captures the proportion of each stakeholder group that participated in the study, and the second construct captures the total time spent by each group in intervention and evaluation activities. As developed by the researcher, the spreadsheet also captured race/ethnicity, gender, and home language for potential supplemental analysis.

Document comparison focus group protocol. The purpose of the document comparison focus group protocol was to investigate the cultural responsiveness of the Gentlemen's Code, specifically in terms of its unique alignment to the cultures, values, and experiences of the Gentlemen and their families—its cultural synchronization (Irvine, 1990; Monroe & Obidah, 2004). The researcher-developed protocol (Appendix F), guided Gentlemen in three steps to compare the Gentlemen's Code to North's existing schoolwide behavioral expectations, titled Habits of Work and Learning (HOWLs). The HOWLs (Appendix G) are a list of faculty-designed target behaviors grouped under three standards: respect, responsibility, and perseverance. The final step in the document comparison focus group protocol prompted participants to collectively produce a Venn diagram showing similarities and differences between the HOWLs and the Code.

Group interview protocol. The researcher-developed group interview protocol (Appendix H) served to explore participant perceptions of three hypothesized short-term outcomes: (a) cultural synchronization of the Code (Irvine, 1990; Monroe & Obidah, 2004), (b) recurring reference to the code in milieu, and (c) empowerment of Black male students and their families in defining behavioral norms. This third outcome was an amalgamation of Mitra's (2003, 2009) guidelines for successful student-adult collaborations and Cummins' (2001) framework for the empowerment of minority students. Example prompts include "Does the Gentlemen's Code reflect your culture and beliefs? Describe a time when you heard a student or a teacher mention the Gentlemen's Code. What worked well about the collaboration?"

Survey of perceptions about the Gentlemen. The purpose of the survey of perceptions about the Gentlemen was to explore two hypothesized medium-term outcomes of the intervention: (a) stronger positive self-image for the Gentlemen and (b) stronger positive reputation of the Gentlemen among faculty and staff. The survey (Appendix I) included three researcher-developed items: "What is the Gentlemen's Group? What are the Gentlemen like? What impact does being part of the group have on its members?" The questions were open response so as not to predetermine respondent characterizations of the group, as suggested by Cresswell (2014).

Discipline database. Measurement of the hypothesized long-term outcome of shifts in disciplinary referral patterns drew from the SWIS database (May et al., 2019). North records all disciplinary referrals in this database, including information on the incident, involved parties, and response. SWIS includes demographic data drawn from the district student information system. It also uses standardized lists of offense and consequence types, thus facilitating clarity of analysis.

Field notes. I maintained field notes as described by Schutt (2015) throughout the course of the intervention. These included notes taken during and after each intervention and evaluation activity, as well as general daily observations relevant to the intervention. They provided a log of participant observer observations and also functioned as a reflexivity journal as defined by DeWalt, DeWalt, and Wayland (1998), capturing my thoughts and feelings over the course of the study. This method encourages critical reflection, awareness of subjectivity, and provided an additional measure of triangulation in interpreting the data (Maharaj, 2016; Phillipi & Lauderdale, 2017).

Procedure

The final section in this chapter describes procedures for participant recruitment, intervention implementation, data collection, and data analysis.

Participant recruitment. Intervention and evaluation in this research study involved various stakeholders at different times. Each participant group was recruited and consented/assented in a unique manner.

Gentlemen. To recruit Gentlemen participants, I included a combined parental permission and student assent form in the Gentlemen's back-to-school packet of forms provided by the school. The form detailed all intervention and evaluation activities in which the Gentlemen could participate. As appropriate, the form was provided in Arabic, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and Somali. Follow up phone calls, using a language line as needed, were made to those families who had not returned the forms within two weeks. I also visited lunch meetings of the Gentlemen to preview each activity, to answer questions, and to provide extra copies of the permission/assent form.

Facilitators. To recruit facilitators for selected intervention activities, I made phone calls

to recent alumni of the Gentlemen nominated by the school social worker. Those who expressed interest received copies of combined parental permission and student assent forms through both inter-school and U. S. mail. At the school social worker's recommendation, I also obtained informed consent from a community volunteer facilitator of color who had, for two years, been involved intermittently with Gentlemen activities.

Other guests. To recruit family members and other community members for the dinner and input session, I provided the Gentlemen with invitations on student-designed Gentlemen stationary (Appendix J). The Gentlemen signed the invitations and addressed them to their desired recipients. The invitations went out in duplicate—once with the Gentlemen themselves and once in the mail. They were also sent by e-mail and through a multilingual text-messaging system North uses to contact families. At the event itself, informed consent forms—also provided in Arabic, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and Somali—were distributed to attendees for review, clarification, and signature. Those who opted not to sign were still welcomed to participate in the event, but their input was not included as data in this research study. Those who did participate were later invited by phone and email to a group interview.

Faculty and staff. The full faculty and staff were recruited to participate in the survey of perceptions about the Gentlemen (Appendix I) via announcements and links in the weekly faculty newsletter. The survey included at its beginning informed consent information and an option to consent electronically.

Intervention. The intervention included an iterative, multi-stakeholder design process culminating in a Gentlemen's Code. This took place in Trimester 1 of 2019-2020. It continued, in Trimester 2, with activities for presenting the Code to the school community and for maintaining awareness of it.

Initial drafting session. In this after school session in mid-September 2019, alumnus facilitator Abdul[5] led a 60-minute session with a group of Gentlemen using the initial drafting session protocol (Appendix K). In the first 20 minutes, Abdul asked the Gentlemen to orally brainstorm a list of habits that define a Gentleman, recording them on a whiteboard, emphasizing the students' role as interpreters of their own reality (Mitra, 2003). In the second 20 minutes, he showed the Gentlemen North's HOWLs standards and targets (Appendix G), asking the Gentlemen to compare their brainstormed list and the HOWLs in order to surface cultural differences such as those predicted by Monroe (2005) and Townsend (2000). In the final 20 minutes, the facilitator asked for any remaining additions to the list and asked participants to put checkmarks next to the three items on the whiteboard they felt most strongly about. By consensus, they simplified the notes into a draft Code.

Dinner and input session. In late September 2019, the Gentlemen hosted a two-hour dinner at a local intercultural community center seen by the school social worker as a comfortable space for immigrant families. The event was organized loosely as a world café or shared space café, related intercultural dialogue models (Brown & Isaacs, 2005; Portland Empowered, 2019). Gentlemen and guests sat intermixed together. Interpreters were offered in advance, but no guests requested them. After a presentation about the Gentlemen and the draft Code, alumnus facilitator Emon and the community volunteer facilitator helped adults and older siblings guide each table in conversation about the draft code by using the dinner input session protocol (Appendix L). Each table had a copy of the draft on which they wrote observations and revision suggestions.

Final drafting session. In early October 2019, the community volunteer facilitator met

[5] All names are pseudonyms.

with the Gentlemen after school. He used the final drafting session protocol (Appendix M) to guide small groups of Gentlemen 15 to 30 minutes each to review the draft code and the suggestions and observations from the dinner and input session, and to make final revisions to the code. The community volunteer facilitator used notes from the meeting to make final adjustments to the Code.

Presentation to community. In mid-October 2019, I worked with the Gentlemen to make a short film sharing the Code. I presented it at a faculty meeting and linked it in the weekly faculty and staff bulletin. Gentlemen also posted the Code in common spaces around the school and provided copies to all faculty for posting in their classrooms. Some Gentlemen also showed the Code and the video presentation to their families at October student conferences. These presentation methods were intended to guard against messaging being wholly adult-driven, which is important to creating authentic student-adult collaborations (Fielding, 2011a, 2011b; Hart, 2008; Shier, 2001).

Booster videos. During the period from November 2019 to March 2020, I video recorded Gentlemen reflecting on the Code, editing, and producing three additional short videos that were shown to faculty, Gentlemen, and families and shared via an unlisted YouTube link. The purpose of these booster videos was to maintain intervention momentum, as suggested in the literature (Mockler & Groundwater-Smith, 2015).

Data collection. Data collection took place throughout the intervention. The summary matrix (Appendix D) details the alignment of research questions and collection methods.

Attendance spreadsheet. During each activity, I handwrote a list of attendees. Immediately after each activity, I used that list to update names and time spent in each activity in a secure Excel version of the attendance spreadsheet (Appendix E). At the conclusion of data

collection, I used North's student information system to interpolate gender, race/ethnicity, and home language for each participant into the spreadsheet. Then I replaced names with pseudonyms and participant numbers.

Document comparison focus group. During the February, 2020, document comparison focus group in my office at North, I audio-recorded the conversation with a voice memo application on my laptop and external omnidirectional microphones. I also took a digital photograph of the Venn diagram the focus group generated.

Group interviews. Group interviews took place at different times for different types of participant. The alumni facilitators and the community volunteer facilitator were interviewed in October 2019 at a local high school. I audio-recorded the conversation with a voice memo application on my laptop and external omnidirectional microphones. The group interview for facilitators took one hour. The group interview for adult participants from the dinner and input session took place in March 2020, in the North library. I audio-recorded the conversation with a voice memo application on my laptop and external omnidirectional microphones. This session took 90 minutes. Finally, the group interview for Gentlemen participants took place in April 2020 via Google Hangout because of North's COVID-19 building closure. I audio-recorded the conversation with a voice memo application. This conversation took one hour.

Survey of perceptions about the Gentlemen. I administered the survey of perceptions about the Gentlemen four times. In September 2019, along with the school social worker, I invited Gentlemen participants after school to a classroom, where I AirDropped them each a link to the survey in Google Forms. It took participants between 5 and 20 minutes to complete the survey. That same month, I shared a link to the survey in Google Forms with all faculty and staff via an announcement at our weekly meeting and via the weekly faculty and staff newsletter. I

estimate that respondents took a similar range of time to complete the survey. I readministered the survey to both groups in March 2020 using the same collection method. All responses automatically compiled from Google Forms into Google Sheets. I copied the contents from Sheets into NVivo for analysis.

Discipline data. In March 2020, at the conclusion of the intervention period, I used SWIS to generate a Microsoft Excel export containing schoolwide referral data for Trimesters 2 of 2018-2019 and Trimesters 1 and 2 of 2019-2020. I replaced student names and identification numbers with participant numbers.

Field notes. From August 2019 to April 2020, I recorded field notes in a secure Microsoft Word file. I took initial notes during each activity and refined and elaborated them immediately afterwards. I also took time in between activities to record reflections and observations. The complete field notes contain entries for 83 distinct days, comprising 47 single-spaced pages.

Data analysis. Data analysis began in September 2019 with initial organization of preintervention survey data and continued as data became available. The bulk of the analysis occured in March and April 2020, after Trimester 2 concluded.

Attendance spreadsheet. I calculated descriptive statistics for participation, distinguishing participants as Gentlemen, guests, or faculty and staff. First, I totalled the count of attendees by participant group at each activity. Second, I calculated the reach (Linnan & Stickler, 2002) for each type of participant by dividing the number of participants in the study by the total population of that group. In the case of families, I divided the number of Gentlemen who had a family member participate by the number of Gentlemen. Third, I totaled the person-hours spent by each participant group in intervention activities and in evaluation activities. To arrive at these

figures, I totaled the number of minutes recorded per group and divided by 60. When available and applicable, I also included parallel calculations for non-participant attendees in these analyses.

Document comparison focus group. I used the photograph of the Venn diagram to create an identical figure in PowerPoint. I converted the audio recording of the focus group to text using NVivo Transcription, then edited it for accuracy while listening to the original recording. I used the resulting transcript to source quotes that helped explain the Venn diagram that the students had produced.

Group interviews. I converted the audio recording of the group interviews to text using NVivo Transcription, then edited it for accuracy while listening to the original recording. In cases where the school social worker was present for the interview, she also reviewed the transcript for accuracy. I coded group interview transcripts for themes in NVivo using an iterative process of reading the transcripts several times, each time refining a list of codes for clarity, coverage, and minimal overlap. For interview questions 1 through 7, I used directed content analysis, which derives codes from an *a priori* framework (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The directed content analysis used Cummins' (2001) framework for the empowerment of minority students as an analytic frame for questions 1 through 4 and Mitra's (2003, 2009) conditions for success in student-adult collaboration as an analytic frame for questions 5 through 7. Table 4.2 details the constructs and codes derived from each frame. Responses to question 8, which asked respondents to describe instances in which the Gentlemen's code was referenced by a student or teacher, were coded using conventional content analysis, which iteratively defines emergent codes (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

Table 4.2

Codes for Directed Content Analysis of Group Interviews

Construct	Codes
Cultural/linguistic incorporation	Subtractive
	Additive
Community participation	Exclusionary
	Collaborative
Pedagogy	Transmission
	Reciprocal
Assessment	Legitimization
	Advocacy
Gentlemen served as experts on their own experience.	Expert
Gentlemen served as interpreters between students and adults.	Interpreter
The presence of Gentlemen made it uncomfortable for adults to act unprofessionally.	Buffer
Activities did not directly attack a teacher's practice.	Non-blaming
Dialogue protected from external or bureaucratic threats.	Insulated
Bridges built with teachers in the school.	Bridge
Adult advisors supported.	Advisors supported
Explicit work on developing equitable youth-adult relationships.	Training
Work validated through visible victories.	Visible victories
Sufficient time allocated.	Time

Note. Constructs adapted from the following sources: "HER classic reprint: Empowering minority students: A framework for intervention," by J. Cummins, 2001, *Harvard Educational Review, 71*, p. 663. Copyright 2001 by President and Fellows of Harvard College. "Student voice in school reform: Reframing student-teacher relationships," by D. L. Mitra, 2003, *McGill Journal of Education/Revue des scienes de l'education de McGill, 38*, p. 289. Copyright 2003 by President and Fellows of McGill University. "Strengthening student voice initiatives in high schools: An examination of the supports needed for school-based youth-adult partnerships," by D. L. Mitra, 2009, *Youth & Society, 40,* p. 311. Copyright 2009 by Sage Publishing.

Survey of perceptions about Gentlemen. I iteratively coded survey responses in NVivo. My first pass of coding sought simply to rate each respondent's answers to the three survey questions holistically as positive (all good), mixed (clear positive and negatives), negative (all bad), or neutral (no value statements). I did this twice: once to rate each respondent's holistic perception of the Gentlemen as individuals and again to rate each respondent's holistic perception of the impact of the group on its members. Next, I sought to identify finer-grained themes and thematic shifts. I read through the preintervention and postintervention responses four times for both the gentlemen and the faculty and staff, each time refining a list of emergent thematic codes for maximum coverage, limited overlap, and meaningfulness as described by Cresswell (2014).

Discipline data. I used SPSS to generate descriptive statistics (mean, median, standard deviation) regarding disciplinary referral counts for Gentlemen and all other students across three time periods: Trimester 2 of 2018-2019 (Pre_1), Trimester 1 of 2019-2020 (Pre_2), and Trimester 2 of 2019-2020 (Post). I also used the Related-Samples Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test to check for changes in Gentlemen disciplinary referrals between the control trimesters (Pre_1 and Pre_2) and the treatment trimester (Post). I also completed the test for all non-Gentlemen students for comparison. From the Wilcoxon Test, I reported sample size, p value, and effect size ($r_{Wilcoxon} = z/\sqrt{N}$). Finally, I performed further descriptive analysis to explore underlying trends, including describing mean referrals for each time period for five groups—Black females, White females, Black males, White males, and Gentlemen—and examining the frequency of each offense type among Gentlemen referrals for each time period.

Field notes. I used NVivo to code field note passages that were salient to each of the

research questions and consulted those passages when analyzing the formal data collected for each question. In both instances, I used the data both for triangulation and as a tool for keeping my own subjectivity in mind during analysis, as recommended by Maharaj (2016) and Phillipi and Lauderdale (2017).

Chapter 5

Findings and Discussion

The Gentlemen, an affinity and mutual support group at North Middle School, grew out of North's school social worker's concern about the overrepresentation of black males in disciplinary referrals at North, a problem national in scope (Gregory et al., 2010; Losen & Gillespie, 2012; Noguera, 2003). Research literature posits mulitiple causes and factors in such overrepresentation (Gregory et al., 2010). The needs assessment study in Chapter 2 suggested that stakeholders at North might be specifically responsive to an intervention that targeted differential selection as a primary factor driven by the secondary factors of bias and cultural difference, especially if it involved asking students of color and their families to articulate their perspectives about behavior and behavior management. Based on a review of literature, I designed an intervention that was to bring the Gentlemen, their families, and other perceived allies to develop a culturally responsive set of behavioral norms—a Gentlemen's Code. This Code, it was hypothesized, might bolster the Gentlemen's perceptions of themselves as school community members, improve faculty and staff perceptions of the Gentlemen, and mitigate some of the cultural dissonance and racial and gender bias that might lead to discipline disparities at North.

In this final chapter, I describe and evaluate the process and outcomes of the intervention. The first section of the chapter details the process of implementation, the second section describes findings for each research question, and the third section draws summary conclusions. The chapter ends with a discussion of the limitations and implications of the study and its findings.

Process of Implementation

Implementation of the intervention involved a sequence of planned activities that focused on generating a Gentlemen's Code and then integrating the Code into the daily life of the school. The following description of implementation is organized by major intervention activity as listed in Chapter 4 and in the logic model (Appendix C). It draws on data from the attendance spreadsheet, interview and focus group transcripts, and researcher field notes. It is intended neither to reiterate the procedures listed in the previous chapter nor to answer the research questions. Instead, it serves to provide a dense description of the process of implementation, which can strengthen the transferability and trustworthiness of results (Krefting, 1991).

Initial Drafting Session

The Gentlemen first met to begin drafting a Code one day after school in mid-September 2019. The school social worker, her intern, and the community volunteer facilitator, were present to support alumnus facilitator Abdul, a Somali-American ninth grader, as needed. Most attendees were seventh graders. I reminded the Gentlemen that the session would be recorded but that only comments from those with consent and assent would be transcribed for the research. I then left. Abdul recounted the history of the Gentlemen from his perspective and led the Gentlemen in brainstorming ideas for a draft Code.

Abdul at first attempted to use a talking piece, an object that would be passed around the circle giving only the person holding it the right to speak. This practice broke down quickly, however, and the entire session was characterized by a great deal of crosstalk and off-topic joking. Even with the efforts of the adults in the room, it was difficult to maintain purposefulness and seriousness in the conversation. Much of the interruption and joking was led by two Gentlemen who had spent sixth grade at a different school and were new to the Gentlemen. The school social worker, social work intern, and the community volunteer facilitator reported to

me—and the audio recording confirms—that the few times a participant attempted to dig deep and make a thoughtful contribution to the conversation, the joking appeared to cause that participant to retreat from the effort. For example, the following exchange happened midway through the session:

> Kell: I'm Kell, and I want to tell people that the Gentlemen are not just kids who joke around. Teachers always think that we're just a group that… Yeah, so I want to show teachers that we're not just people who play basketball everyday after school. I want to show them that we're more than that.
>
> Abdul: Yeah. How do you do that?
>
> Kell: By being a great student at school. By getting good grades. Not just playing around. Like right now, you guys. Laughing…. [laughter and crosstalk]
>
> Student: Oh! Everything's being recorded?
>
> Abdul: So how do you all support each other being great students?
>
> Abdi: Collaborate together.
>
> Syed: We give each other lotion when we need it. I give it to Muhsin every single day! [laughter and crosstalk]
>
> Community volunteer facilitator: So I like that. Being a great student. We collaborate. And persevere. All right. So, what are some more ideas for a Gentlemen's Code. Or did you [Kell] want to say anything else?
>
> Kell: No, I'm good.

Despite the sometimes-raucous atmosphere, the participants generated a viable draft list of tenets for a Gentlemen's Code.

> You have to be a role model (being an example)

Listening (teachers, parents, each other)

Being a great student

We collaborate and persevere

Stick up for each other

Own up to your mistakes

Cheer each other up

Dinner and Input Session

The dinner and input session took place in early October in a local community mental health agency that specializes in the needs of immigrants. The school social worker serves as a counselor there in the evenings, and the executive director is a Somali immigrant and an advocate for the Gentlemen. The space was modestly appointed and is used by the immigrant community for events such as wedding receptions. Getting the guests to the dinner was a complicated task requiring volunteer drivers for students and an Uber being sent for one family. Because people arrived at different times, there was a significant unstructured block of time at the beginning of the event. A volunteer arrived with the food, which had been prepared by a local Iraqi restaurant. The families were invited to go through the food line first. One Black American parent suggested that in the future, the Gentlemen be dressed in tuxedoes and serve the food to families at their tables. "Now that would be Gentlemen!" she exclaimed.

The Gentlemen without families present gathered around several tables, with adult guests spread among them. The students were relatively loud and physically active. One student was laughing so hard that he stood up and vomited his biryani into his hands and onto the floor. Instead of helping, the Gentlemen near him ran around the room laughing and mock-screaming. One family, who had come dressed formally, was visibly aghast.

When order was restored and the biryani was mostly cleaned up, I used a microphone to gather the attendees' attention. I thanked everyone for their attendance and introduced the school social worker, who briefly recounted the history of the Gentlemen and her motives in sponsoring the group. She focused specifically on her perception of disciplinary bias against Black boys. She explained that I was doing research to try to address this issue and that this dinner was part of it. I reiterated the intent of the study, how to provide optional informed consent, that consent was not required to attend, and that only anonymously and only with consent would I use anything attendees said in my research. Next, the audience viewed a short video I had produced the previous school year from interviews with Gentlemen about their group. When the Gentlemen had shared the same video with faculty and staff in the spring of 2019, they appeared nervous, whispering and giggling throughout, even taunting each other when one of them would appear on screen. I reminded them of that afternoon, assured them that it is natural to feel funny seeing oneself on screen, and asked them to hold their comments so that their guests could hear the video. They were attentive and quiet during the brief screening.

At this point, alumnus facilitator Emon shared the draft code, which had evolved slightly due to interim student input:

What makes us Gentlemen?

We are role models.

We work hard.

We own up to our mistakes and come back from them.

We support each other.

We are family.

Emon and the community volunteer facilitator then helped adults and older siblings lead table

discussions about what to change about the draft code, then share out to the larger group. One mother and father appeared too shy to participate and stepped away from the tables. An Iraqi couple appeared uncertain how the emphasis on Black boys in some of the discussion related to their son and their family. Their table did not engage with the activity, but beckoned me over to talk to their older son, a graduate of North. The third, formally-dressed couple appeared honored to share their perceptions and contributed actively to the discussion. The Gentlemen all participated, but adults and facilitators at the tables reported that the students had trouble focusing on the activity and coming up with meaningful contributions. The notes from each table were compiled verbatim into a list of suggestions for revision to the Code.

Additional ideas:

We are leaders.

We show effort.

We care about our grades.

Be kind.

Be a leader, not a follower.

Be the best you can be (reaching our goals).

Be a bigger person.

Treat others the way you want to be treated.

As I circulated between tables, I also noted that the formally-dressed couple asserted that *We work hard* struck them as an inaccurate statement about the Gentlemen. They pushed their son to admit that he does not work hard at his studies. One older sibling also offered that he thought of the Gentlemen as "a group of boys fighting for what's fair and right."

Finally, the community volunteer facilitator spoke briefly about the importance of the

group, encouraging everybody present to stay committed to it. After all the students and families had found a ride home, a handful of adults stayed behind to clean the function room. In their informal debriefing, some expressed happiness about how the event had gone. Others expressed concern about the student behavior and the need for a higher degree of structure in the group.

Final Drafting Session

The final drafting session took place after school on the day after the dinner and input session. None of the alumni facilitators showed up; therefore, they were replaced at the last minute with the school social worker and the community volunteer facilitator, who had attended the previous two activities. Based on lessons drawn from the first session, we decided to convene smaller groups: first a group of three, then a group of four. Three of the seven students were participants in the study. With the calmer atmosphere and smaller setting, the students engaged more deeply, and occasional jokes did not derail the conversation. One student suggested that the Code take the form of a poem. Others agreed.

The community volunteer e-mailed me and the school social worker several days later with the revised Code that emerged from the final drafting session.

> I am a Gentleman….
>
> I fight for what is fair and right. I own up to my mistakes and learn from them. I lead by example and take care of those I lead. I am kind….I am helpful….and I give my best in everything that I do.
>
> I always show up for my fellow gentleman because we are family.
>
> We are gentleman….
>
> We support each other when we are not feeling the best. We help each other stay focused and put in the extra work to get good grades. We know how to have fun. We understand

that the world is greater than the sum of its parts. We always ask questions, seek to learn and experience the world around us.

Because we are gentlemen.

I expressed concern to him and to the school social worker that, even though it was clearly meant figuratively, the word "fight" might be problematic because of recent work to reduce the fight culture at North. He proposed synonyms that could capture the same sentiment. The school social worker replied that social justice requires fighting and suggested simply adding "We don't fight with each other" as a separate precept that she had heard Gentlemen assert before. She also asked to strike two sentences that seemed to come from the community volunteer, not from the Gentlemen. The final Code was as follows:

I am a Gentleman.

I fight for what is fair and right. I own up to my mistakes and learn from them. I lead by example and take care of those I lead.

I am kind... I am helpful... and I give my best in everything that I do.

I always show up for my fellow Gentlemen because we are family.

We are Gentlemen.

We support each other when we are not feeling the best.

We help each other stay focused and put in the extra work to get good grades.

We don't fight with each other.

We know how to have fun.

Because we are Gentlemen.

Presentation to Community

The original plan was to have the Gentlemen select representatives to share their final

draft with the full faculty and staff at an October professional development meeting. As the date neared, however, the school social worker asked for an alternative. She perceived the combined faculty and staff as too White and too hostile to the Gentlemen for that to be a comfortable position in which to put students. Indeed, complaints both about the Gentlemen and about how the school social worker manages the group had been a refrain from some faculty and staff for several years. One staff member had, for example, reported to me around this time that some people felt that the school social worker is "singlehandedly bringing the school down" by "letting the kids get away with whatever they want." That sentiment could also be inferred in some of the perceptual survey responses, as discussed later in this chapter.

In response to the social worker's request, I agreed to alter the presentation format to a video. I visited the Gentlemen at their lunch meetings, as well as before and after school, to have them speak portions of the final Code to a camera. The sixth grade Gentlemen, now formed, were excited to participate and spoke with earnest sincerity. The seventh grade Gentlemen struggled not to interrupt each other and made jokes such as talking with banana in their mouths, while going in and out of a closet, or with a parodic African accent. The eighth-grade group was serious but somewhat shy. I edited the raw material so that the video presented the Code in sequence, with each precept repeated two to four times by various students.

The next afternoon, a staff member came to me to share that a number of eighth grade Gentlemen had just walked off of the soccer team in solidarity with a Gentleman who had been removed from the team for using strong profanity with a referee. I expressed concern that evening to the school social worker that this incident might make some faculty and staff non-receptive to the video presentation. She responded that she had already spent time processing with the boys and with the staff member. She argued that "We can't wait for the right time." The

next morning, I filmed the additional students and worked with the school social worker to get a group shot. The eighth grade Gentlemen were still disgruntled about the soccer incident and were visibly reluctant to appear in the shot.

In mid-October, I showed the final edit of the video to faculty and staff at an after-school professional development session. There were visibly and audibly positive responses from some during the showing. The principal allowed time for questions and comments. One teacher said that they had seen a positive difference this year in the Gentlemen. Another expressed optimism about a Gentleman in the video who had recently committed to her to improve his behavior. Several asked if they could have the Code displayed in their rooms so they could reference it with the boys. There was a brief discussion about whether the Code should be used as a tool for correcting non-desired behavior or as a tool for affirming desired behavior. There was interest in seeing the word "fight" replaced with a non-violent synonym. The school social worker stated that she would stand by that word and that the students perceive the need to fight for social justice. None of the three adults of color present offered comments or questions.

I had a large poster of the Code printed for the school social worker's room, the fonts and layout having been edited by a Gentleman. The school social worker played the video version for individual Gentlemen's families at October's student-led conferences. The video version was also redistributed in the principal's weekly email to faculty and staff. The school social worker and I began occasionally referring to the poster with students or showing them the video version when processing behavioral incidents. The same practice was used with families on occasion. In November, the Gentlemen requested and received six more copies of the poster to hang in specific places in the building. They had identified locations where perceived allies of the Gentlemen might see it and reference it in a supportive manner. Per faculty request, I also made

a smaller copy for each teacher to hang if they wished.

Booster Videos

To sustain engagement with the Code among students and adults, I worked with the Gentlemen to produce three additional booster videos during the period from November 2019 to March 2020, which were released via unlisted YouTube links. The first booster video stemmed from a spontaneous request from seventh grade Gentlemen after school to hang up the six Gentlemen's Code posters they had requested from me. Four of the five were participants in the study. I filmed the five volunteers as they walked around the school selecting places to hang the posters. They chose prominent spots in the lobby, the gym, the library, and each of the three grade-level hallways. For the camera, the students reflected on parts of the Code that stood out to them. I also asked what they would want teachers to do if they were not following one of the precepts in the Code. They expressed a desire that teachers remind them of the Code and explicitly ask them to try to follow its precepts. The school social worker showed the video at Gentlemen's lunches, and I put a link to it in the weekly faculty and staff bulletin.

The sixth grade Gentlemen asked me if they could star in the next booster video, and a faculty member proposed a theme for it. He had noticed that the previous video discussed what teachers should do if a Gentleman is not following the Code, but he thought it might be more productive to discuss what teachers should do if a Gentleman *is* following the Code. During a lunch meeting of the sixth grade Gentlemen, students signed copies of the Code and put them in teachers' mailboxes. I filmed this process and asked each of them to describe what they want teachers to do if they catch them following the Gentlemen's Code. Although one student suggested that teachers offer a reward, the rest asked for simple verbal affirmations. The school social worker again shared the video at Gentlemen's lunches. I linked it to the weekly faculty

and staff bulletin. Because the online view count was low, I also showed it at a faculty and staff meeting.

In January, four young women of color from two local non-profit organizations came to have lunch with the Fierce Girls. They had been provided earlier videos about the Gentlemen and noted that the videographer and editor, the student researcher, is a White man. They suggested that more authentic videos might arise if filmed and edited by people of color. I asked two eighth grade Gentlemen if they would like to film the next booster video. They expressed interest in interviewing students about struggles the Gentlemen face at school, especially in terms of bias. They spent one lunch period filming each other with no adult present and requested that they do the editing as well. The resulting video featured close-ups of those present, a few spare snippets of disconnected speech, and background music. The school social worker shared it with the Gentlemen during lunches and with selected faculty and staff.

I also asked a small group of seventh grade Gentlemen if they would film themselves in conversation about the Code with a young South Sudanese volunteer who was providing them some mentorship. They agreed. In the resulting video, the mentor asks the Gentlemen what is missing in the Code. They said that after their mentorship from him, they believed the Code could say more about respect. They conversed about the importance of respectful listening, the nuances of playful teasing, and what it means to be fair. The school social worker shared this video with the Gentlemen, and I linked it in a faculty and staff newsletter. This was the final formal intervention activity.

Notably, the intervention period ended the day before the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a shift to online learning, radically altering the context. Fortunately, all but one evaluation activity had already been completed, and this research study was not wholly upended

by the pandemic.

Findings

The previous section provided a narrative description of the process of intervention implementation. The present section turns to detailed findings from the process and outcome evaluations, using the research questions as an underlying structure.

Participation

Table 5.1

Attendance at Intervention and Evaluation Activities—Participants (Non-participants)

Activity, Duration	Gentlemen	Guests	Faculty and Staff
Perceptual Survey (Pre), 20 min.	13		48
Initial Drafting Session, 60 min.	10 (2)	2 (1)	1
Dinner and Input Session, 120 min.	12 (3)	11 (7)	3
Final Drafting Session, 60 min.	4 (3)	1	
Presentation and Booster Videos, 20-90 min.	13 (24)		45 (15)
Document Comparison Focus Group, 30 min.	9		
Group Interviews, 60 min.	4	4	3
Perceptual Survey (Post), 20 min.	9		43

Note: Some intervention activities were open to individuals not participating in this research study. Their attendance counts are noted in parentheses.

By design, this research study was intended to engage a wide variety of stakeholders, including Gentlemen, their families, their perceived allies, and North's faculty and staff. Furthermore, many of the activities were open to people not participating in the study. It is an important part of process evaluation, therefore, to clarify how various stakeholders were involved in intervention and evaluation activities (PRQ1). Table 5.1 details the number of individuals who attended each intervention and evaluation activity, distinguishing between those who were study participants and those who were not.

Calculations of reach (Linnan & Stickler, 2002) show that participants represented 69%

of North's faculty and staff, 30% of Gentlemen, and 5% of Gentlemen families. The high rate of faculty and staff participation was in part attributable to the ease of completing the preintervention and postintervention surveys and the fact that presentation and booster videos were shown at faculty meetings. Gentlemen showed themselves quite eager to participate, with 77% involving themselves in at least one activity. The fact that only 30% of Gentlemen were participants seemed to have been rooted in the difficulty of getting consent/assent paperwork signed. My field notes include these reflections from the start of the 2019-2020 school year:

> This will be down to the wire for getting assent/consent and getting invitations out. The assent/consent forms themselves are long, confusing, and disconcerting. The translation firm commented on that as well. This happened at the same time as the school is trying to chase down its own confusing and redundant (and often untranslated) paperwork from parents for the start of the year. It is already very difficult to get school paperwork to and from homes, especially multilingual homes.

The very low participation among Gentlemen families might be attributable to these issues also, but additional possible barriers to family participation were discussed in the adult group interview, which no Gentlemen families attended.

At that interview, Ms. Levin observed that, "People are really busy and work a ton." Ms. Darby cited, "time of day," although I had offered flexible scheduling. Mr. Tyson wondered if families would have been more engaged if the Gentlemen was led by someone with a similar cultural background to the families. He noted that one long-time North faculty member, an African immigrant, had asked at a recent faculty meeting how he could get involved with the Gentlemen. It was striking to Mr. Tyson that this teacher had never been invited to meet with the Gentlemen. The school social worker replied that a new, younger African immigrant staff

member was meeting regularly with the Gentlemen. When pressed, she revealed a personal belief that young adults of color are more compelling to and more in tune with the needs and experiences of the Gentlemen than are the Gentlemen's parents or people of color of their parents' generation. As a lead spokesperson and gatekeeper for all Gentlemen activities, she may have held back from encouraging parents to participate in the intervention, worrying that parents might not understand its purpose and activities.

Another possible reason for low family engagement in the intervention was discussed in a context outside of the research study. My field notes contain mention of a November 2019 meeting I attended that brought together district personnel and members of the local South Sudanese community to discuss how schools could better serve South Sudanese boys. I noted that the convener, a district employee and member of the South Sudanese community, "said that some people called concerned that this meeting was for somebody's research; that the meeting was really for the benefit of a White person." Although no families expressed this to me during recruitment for my research study, it is possible that they held a similar concern. Indeed, I worried throughout the study about the moral implications of building my own privilege by earning a doctorate in part by engaging the labor of marginalized students and families.

The final analysis of participation described totaled the number of person-hours spent in activities per participant group. Table 5.2 shows how all three groups were represented by this measure.

Table 5.2

Total Person-hours Spent in Intervention and Evaluation Activities—Participants (Non-participants)

Activity Type	Gentlemen	Guests	Faculty and Staff
Intervention Activities	44 (20.3)	25.5 (3.7)	53.8 (10)
Evaluation Activities	9	15	6

Useful Qualities of the Process

Drafting and implementing the Gentlemen's Code involved a variety of student-adult collaborations. Identifying those qualities of the collaboration process that participants found useful (PRQ2) provides important information about the intervention process and outcomes. It can also inform future adaptations of the intervention at North or elsewhere. In Chapter 3, I discussed Mitra's (2003, 2009) three pathways for meaningful student participation and seven conditions for success in student-adult collaborations. These served as an *a priori* framework for interpreting interview transcripts and field notes to answer PRQ2. From that framework, *students as experts and interpreters* and *equitable student-adult relationships* emerged as qualities participants identified as useful in the intervention. An additional quality—*having fun*—was also perceived by participants as useful. Unless otherwise noted, all data in this section is from group interviews.

Students as experts and interpreters. One theme across stakeholder groups was an appreciation that the intervention process gave Gentlemen the opportunity to articulate their experience and beliefs in their own words. For example, many named that as a useful part of the collaboration. Alumnus facilitator Emon said, "Before, we didn't know how to put it into words. It was just a feeling. But after this process, they were able to put it into words." Alumnus facilitator Abdul had been notably able to "put it into words" when he appeared in a video about

the Gentlemen the year before but believed that the group's understanding of itself had evolved further as a result of the intervention process. "It was pretty cool to see how they said it and what they thought about what the Gentlemen's group was… what it meant to them." He further noted that, "it worked well to show people what we're doing and what it's about. I think it's going to inspire people." Both Abdul and Emon also appreciated that the Gentlemen had been able to move through the drafting process from broad, overlapping ideas all the way to a distilled statement. Emon had looked at an early draft and said, "I think it's pretty good for now, but we should only do basic topics. They wrote 'support others' and then they wrote 'help each other out.' And that all falls under the same category." After viewing the final Code and the first video, alumnus facilitator Abdul noted, "They really got to the main parts. That video got to the point of it."

The adults noted that giving the Gentlemen room to come to that final articulation required putting adults in the background at key moments in the drafting process. When adults were present, they were explicitly treated as guests of the Gentlemen, visiting in Gentlemen territory. For the school social worker, that was important but also "nerve-wracking." She appreciated that the adults and alumni who were most intimately involved "could tolerate the chaos" of the dialogue and the process, opining that other faculty and staff would be neither willing nor able to do that. The community volunteer facilitator offered, "I think what works well is that this process has been super organic, and that's how you can capture the richness. It's important to meet people where they're at." He noted that creating a safe, flexible space for dialogue is also trauma-informed. "You know, a lot of people of color and people from low socioeconomic status have a trauma background." I asked for clarification, asking if providing structure and predictability is also, paradoxically, a trauma-informed practice. "Yes," he replied,

"but when you're talking about diversity, equity, inclusion work, there are multiple truths. The Gentlemen are going to create that structure, so what we're doing is being flexible while they do it."

Mitra (2003) highlighted the importance of treating students as experts and interpreters in student-adult collaborations. Rather than describing and evaluating student experiences from an adult perspective, Mitra advocated for allowing students to articulate their own experiences as experts and to serve as interpreters—translating the words of adults into something students understand and relate to and, also, translating the words of students so that adults can understand and relate. A Gentlemen's Code drafted by adults, even adults who were allies of the Gentlemen, would not have captured as accurately the Gentlemen's beliefs about themselves, nor would it have been as compelling to them. As the school social worker argued, "You have to believe that they bring something to the table that no one else does." As far back as the June 2018 summit described at the opening of Chapter 1, the Gentlemen had been asking to clarify among themselves and for their school community what the Gentlemen are all about. The intervention gave them a chance to do so.

Equitable student-adult relationships. Another related quality of the student-adult collaboration that participants identified as useful was the leveling of power between students and adults during the process. Even though the intervention process lacked explicit training for adults and students about equitable relationships, power-leveling was central to both the drafting process and the dissemination process.

In the case of the drafting process, the adult role was largely of creating and holding space for student voice. The initial drafting session was led by a high school student with minor support from the school social worker, her intern, and the community volunteer. The dinner and

input session included as many adults as Gentlemen, but these adults were specifically invited by Gentlemen because they were family members or because they were seen as allies to the group. While those adults provided some structural support, they largely acted as guests instead of supervisors. Even when the Gentlemen could have been seen as too silly at the dinner, no adult was heard chastising them or demanding compliance; the adults were clearly there to listen. The final drafting session was led by the school social worker and the community volunteer. The school social worker resists telling the Gentlemen what to do, and the community volunteer is skilled in equitable student-adult relationships, having worked several years at a youth empowerment non-profit and as an independent equity consultant. The school social worker expressed appreciation that the adults in the drafting process were able to act like guests of the Gentlemen: "It was good for [the Gentlemen] to know this is important enough to sit down at a table, in a room, and that grown-ups are in there giving up their time to listen to them."

Equitable student-adult relationships were also a priority in the dissemination of the Code. The school social worker and I were both anxious that the Code serve as an instrument of student empowerment, not of adult control. If the problem of practice motivating the intervention was that adults at North direct disproportionate attention toward Black boys when enforcing behavioral expectations, then creating an official list of behavioral expectations primarily for Black boys could theoretically lead to increased disciplinary attention. It could amplify any double standards and thus work against the purpose of the intervention. The community volunteer facilitator was a strong voice early in the process that a Code not be a tool through which adults enforce behavioral norms. He saw the Code as only "a step" toward changing adult behavior.

There will be values embedded in the code. These values can also be reflected in school

> policies, practices, and culture. This aspect of the project may be further down the road, but I wanted to be explicit on how the code and the discussion that comes with it can relate to school reform around existing disparities you all are working on (personal communication, July 12, 2019).

The Code, he argued, should be followed by explicit work among adults on mitigating their own bias. He observed that some precepts of the Code, such as *We support each other,* locate power within the Gentlemen, and others, such as *I work hard*, could be used by teachers as a lever for control over Gentlemen. It would be difficult for a teacher to castigate or punish a Gentleman for not being supportive of a fellow Gentlemen, but it would be easy for a teacher to say to a Gentleman, "as a Gentleman, you are supposed to work hard. Work harder or be held accountable." The community volunteer warned, "It's important how the code gets absorbed by the school. And what you choose to do with it."

For her part, the school social worker expressed ambivalence about a Code throughout the project, sometimes seeming invested and sometimes fearing that adults would use it to assert power over the Gentlemen instead of to empower them. She argued that the Gentlemen would not allow adults to abuse the Code: "They know what an authentic communication is with adults." If they didn't see the process or the product as authentic to them, she argued, they simply would not incorporate it into their identity as a group. Part of authenticity, she added, is an understanding that both the adults and the students are fallible. The Gentlemen "know that we make mistakes like they do." If adults collaborating with them are willing to admit that and, when merited, "recant…. That matters… for kids to see us do that authentically."

As discussed earlier, the booster videos also triggered discussion about equitable student-adult relationships in relation to the Code. The screening of the first video caused teachers to

discuss whether or not they should post the Code alongside their HOWLs posters and whether or not they should remind Gentlemen of the Code as a correction for behavior. The filming of the second two videos helped Gentlemen share proposals for how adults should react when they are and aren't following the Code. The final video caused adults at North to contemplate the difference between having a White staff or faculty member teaching Gentlemen about desired behaviors and having young people of color from the community doing the same thing.

Successful student-adult collaborations involve explicit work on leveling the playing field between students and adults, including developing equitable norms, practicing sharing power in conversation, and interrogating power differentials (Mitra, 2003). There was room in this intervention for more explicit cultivation of equitable student-adult relationships. Participants in the drafting process could, for example, have been trained to be aware of power differentials and provided protocols for mitigating them, and the Code itself could also have included precepts about student-adult power relationships. Furthermore, adults could have been given more explicit guidance on how to interact with the final Code in a way that promoted equitable relationships between students and adults. Nonetheless, equitable relationships recurred as a topic of conversation among adults throughout the intervention process. Although Gentlemen did not mention it as an area of strength nor as an area of weakness, adult participants found the focus on leveling the playing field a useful part of the collaboration.

Having fun. Beyond the *a priori* framework for PRQ2, thematic analysis suggested that participants perceived an additional useful quality of the collaboration: having fun. Just as *We know how to have fun* became a precept in the Gentlemen's Code, participants identified having fun as a key part of the intervention process. When asked what worked well about the intervention, participants in the Gentlemen group interview were silent for a moment. "It was

easy and fun," said Reegan. The others agreed. Although the Gentlemen sometimes seemed rambunctious and off-task to some adult participants, alumnus facilitator Abdul was less concerned: "They like to have fun, so they were just a little goofy." Alumnus facilitator Emon warned me, "If you take things too seriously, it's never fun, cuz it's actually proven fact that laughing is good for your health and that, like, if you take everything too seriously and then the world's not going to be right." In fact, he argued, what worked well about the process was that "they didn't take it too seriously, but they actually contributed ideas…. So it's not something that they were just forced upon; it was actually something that they wanted to be a part of." The school social worker echoed that: "I think it worked well for them to hear one another even in those moments... when it was goofy. There were some moments of good stuff that they heard. I think that worked well. If you could, if you could filter out the noise."

Ms. Levin agreed: "I think any young group of kids being asked to do something really deep is going to get squirrely. That's normal." Ms. Darby thought that the older Gentlemen could help the younger Gentlemen balance fun and productivity.

> I was only at the dinner piece of it. But I also struggled myself at my table getting the seventh grade Gentlemen to focus.… Maybe seventh grade boys just need more time.… Maybe they just need more time and exposure to the now current 8th grade boys so that when they're in that role as leaders and have to lead, maybe they'll be less silly and get around to it.

Although the Gentlemen did not expound much in their group interview on the idea of fun, there was little doubt that having fun, for them, was a key motivator and an important part of why they like being Gentlemen.

Empowerment of Minority Students

PRQ2 broadly examined the qualities of the student-adult collaboration that participants found useful, but PRQ3 specifically asked if the intervention was empowering to Black boys. Cummins (2001) framework for the empowerment of minority students (Figure 3.1) framed the interpretation of qualitative data to answer PRQ3. The framework asks of an intervention (a) whether cultural and linguistic differences are treated as liabilities or assets, (b) whether minority communities are kept at bay or collaborated with, (c) whether pedagogy is based on teacher control or shared ownership; and (d) whether assessment is used to confirm student deficits or to identify ways to improve services. The answers to these questions, according to Cummins, determine whether the intervention is disabling or empowering to minority students. The intervention, as it unfolded on the ground, gave Gentlemen significant ownership over process and outcomes. However, the additive influence of cultural and linguistic differences was less (or less obvious) than expected, and questions remained about how to use the finished Code in an empowering manner in the regular course of a school day. Unless otherwise noted, data are from group interviews.

Cultural/linguistic incorporation. The extent to which the intervention outcomes show the incorporation rather than the exclusion of cultural and linguistic differences is discussed in detail below in the findings for ORQ1. Here, in the discussion of process, however, it is worth highlighting that the input and drafting process drew primarily from the insights of current Gentlemen, not from their families. Few families attended the Dinner and Input Session, and those who did contributed relatively little to the conversation about the Code. Furthermore, it is worth highlighting that cultural and linguistic differences were conspicuously absent from the Gentlemen's conversations about the Code. Although the drafting process was set up to allow them to incorporate their cultural and linguistic backgrounds into the Code, it didn't seem to

occur to them to do so—at least explicitly. This could have been because the Gentlemen represent diverse ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic backgrounds and do not identify collectively with a monolithic cultural/linguistic background. It appeared that the Gentlemen might identify more as a team or a family than as representatives of a minority culture. "We are family," is a mantra guaranteed to come up anytime one speaks to the Gentlemen about what it means to be a Gentleman. In the document comparison focus group, Bert named that he stands out as being one of the few White Gentlemen, but that he feels accepted. "We're still family right? Like no matter where you come from." Jason agreed in his strong West African accent: "Yeah. You treat everybody equally. It's a family pretty much." Muhsin, a Black Gentlemen, looked at Bert and nodded: "Yeah, these are my family, like my basketball team is like my family."

The school social worker wondered whether the Gentlemen were too young to explicitly bring cultural and linguistic difference into the conversation: "I think I would have wanted to have more of the old Gentleman there. The kids who were there at the beginning, that had the history. I wish they had been more available." I pointed out that the single precept in the Code that implied some sort of consciousness of racial or cultural inequity—*I fight for what's fair and right*—was proposed by the older brother of a Gentlemen—not by a Gentleman. "I know," she replied. "I think had there been more older Gentlemen there, you know what I mean… I think in some ways he represented that voice. I think it also would have been nice to have more families." It is conceivable that richer family participation might have led to a Code more explicitly imbued with minority cultural norms and values. Whether or not that would have resonated in the same way with the Gentlemen is an open question.

Community participation. According to Cummins (2001), an intervention that excludes

linguistic and cultural minorities from its design and implementation disables minority students, but one that collaborates with those groups is empowering to minority students. In that few families participated in the dinner and input session, the collaborative aspect of this intervention fell far short of intentions.

Over time, the school social worker has not overtly excluded parents from the work of the Gentlemen, but neither has she aggressively drawn them in. Instead, she has preferred to draw in young adults of color from the community. These individuals, who include the community volunteer facilitator, have often been representatives of local non-profits interested in the equity work going on at North. They tend to be involved only intermittently or over the short term. The school social worker wondered if this was a form of exploitation: "We should pay them. You know what I mean? Like is it their job to do this?" She also recalled the November meeting between district staff and representatives of the South Sudanese community. There, several South Sudanese young adults spoke about their desire to get into schools and help create more equitable environments. "Those people say, 'This is our work, and you're right, you can't pay us, and we have to do this on top of volunteering and on top of working at the grocery store, but this is our community value.' I don't know…. It all feels weird to me." She had invited one of the young adults from the meeting to school in the Fall. On his visit, he advised her about a Gentleman who was angry, wearing his hat low over his head, and refusing to make eye contact. "He told me it's okay for the student to sit like that. So I let him. Like, what do I know?" In contrast, my field notes mention a moment when she and I met with a different Gentleman and his father. "He was upset and had his hood on and cinched up. The father made him remove it and said, 'You look like a suspect.'"

Although the social worker preferred community participation to emphasize young adults

of color, the community volunteer facilitator expressed comfort with involving the older generations. He related the Code drafting process to a community book group he was facilitating at North through the non-profit he works for. That concluded with a meeting between the youth book group and a parallel book group of adults of color. "I'm excited, particularly because our book group… I'm definitely going to tie everything into this code. When we have that concluding intergenerational conversation with the elders, the Code will be the frame."

Pedagogy. Cummins (2001) argued that pedagogy that transmits information or expectations to minority students is disabling, although pedagogy that has a reciprocal give and take between minority students and adults is empowering. North has its own behavioral norms, including specific school rules and its more abstract HOWLs (Appendix G). These were all written by North adults and are taught, assessed, and reinforced by adults. In contrast, the Gentlemen's Code was the product of conversations between Gentlemen and adult allies. Although the intervention was adult-initiated, the adults involved and I committed to not presupposing or unduly influencing the Code. We tried to hold space for Gentlemen's voices to be heard and tried to reflect back what we heard for confirmation or correction by the Gentlemen. As the school social worker said, "They are always teaching me what the Gentlemen is." The Code, she pointed out, "is a different one than we would write, I think. I mean I think if grown-ups had put one on, it wouldn't have looked that way."

At the same time, she occasionally expressed concern that the Code was, in fact, unduly shaped by adults. She summarized her fear:

> I will say that having the Code and looking at it through the lens of people of color who have been talking to us, I feel like the Code was sort of massaged by us or manipulated by us to get something in time, to pull something out from them. I don't know that it

would be the same if it had been done by different facilitators—facilitators of color. Although the alumni facilitators and community volunteer facilitator were, in fact, people of color, her point seemed more to be that I was a White man of authority and that I was the overall facilitator of the intervention. Viewing that concern through the lens of Cummin's (2001) argument about pedagogy, the test of empowerment would be whether or not the drafting process was reciprocal and not just a transmission of behavioral norms from me to the Gentlemen. On its face, the intervention passed that test. The Code was the product of a conversation in which student voice was dominant. Whether there were subtler transmissive elements at play—for instance, whether or not the Gentlemen proposed precepts that they thought adults would approve of—is a question worth considering, and future instantiations of this intervention might do well to safeguard against this concern.

Assessment. Perhaps the most interesting question about empowerment in this intervention is how the Gentlemen's Code was and should be used to assess Gentlemen behavior. For Cummins (2001), assessment often serves to validate existing beliefs about minority students but instead should serve as a tool for advocacy. Low average standardized test scores for minority students, for example, should not confirm beliefs about a subgroup's ability or performance. Instead, they should raise the alarm that the system is not serving or measuring such students' achievement appropriately. In the context of the Gentlemen's Code, there was and is a real danger that their expressed behavioral norms could be turned against them to confirm existing adult beliefs. "For Gentlemen, they sure don't act like Gentlemen," is a frequently heard complaint at North.

In the group interview, Mr. Tyson started an interchange on the topic: "I also feel like what's the point of the code; was it just to appease the White staff?" Ms. Levin replied,

> My worry about the Code is that it could potentially be used negatively by staff to twist the meaning of it, which is to uphold the high standard, not to demean someone. I worry that it could develop into that kind of use as a punitive thing.

"Like taking away?" asked Ms. Darby. "Yes," said Ms. Levin, "like taking away pride instead of using it as something to uphold." Mr. Tyson joined back in: "That was my issue…. I was like 'Oh this is really going to the White staff as a tool to call the kids out and another way to punish Black boys.'"

The community volunteer facilitator proposed that people see the Code as a tool for the Gentlemen to use with themselves and also as a tool to foster connection and conversation between Gentlemen and adults: "As we have conversations, they'll feel more comfortable engaging in that with authorities around all this stuff. It's an opportunity to create connection, which is what you need to create a space of inclusivity." He saw some possibility for adults to use the Code to explore "understandings of one another and of belief systems." However, he also saw the danger of using it in a disabling manner, "like, 'Hey man, you all got this code and you're not living up to it!'" He hoped that the Code would stay "aspirational and not limiting. Through this code, adults should be able to better build relationships with Gentlemen. It's not using this code to control Gentlemen." Ms. Levin echoed his thought.

> I think the adults need reminders, too, that the Gentlemen are still eleven and twelve; they are growing up. They are not perfect. Maybe that's a little preamble to the Code: Like "We're trying and we're growing up and we're, like every other kid, going to make errors and mess up, but this is what we aspire to." If there was an aspirational piece to it. Like, "We're not perfect." I think that expectation of the adults is, "Oh, you have this code, now you have to be perfect." That's silly.

Alumnus facilitator Abdul said that adults should use the Code to tell Gentlemen when they are not being gentlemanly: "I think it's right for them to you know, call people out. If they're part of the group, and they're saying stuff like 'We are Gentlemen,' I think it's like basically like a requirement to follow it." Alumnus facilitator Emon had a less severe take: "Well, because everybody makes mistakes, and if you keep pushing them away, saying, 'You're a Gentleman, why aren't you doing this?' you should tell them, but you shouldn't be getting them mad about it. Like you should just put it into kind words." A little pressure is merited, he argued, "but if you put too much on them, they're never gonna, they're actually just gonna be mad about it. They're not going to focus on what you said, but how you said it."

The school social worker described how she had tried to use the Code to build Gentlemen up. She said she used the Code frequently in situations where a Gentleman felt like giving up in the face of perceived bias and inequity. "They say, 'I'm gonna quit this; I don't care about that.' I say, 'But the first one up there is *We fight for what's fair and just.*' So then they rally." The Gentleman, she said, use the Code "to sort of shore each other up." She reported that they "want it hung places people see it. But they're cautious about, not every classroom, but public places. So, I think in some ways they want it to be seen but not used by adults." They want it displayed simply because it "acknowledges who they are. Without any chance to blame or nitpick."

Bert, a White member of the Gentlemen's group, observed during the document comparison focus group that assessment of behavior in general can feel oppressive: "One thing I don't like about the HOWLs, what some of the teachers do with the HOWLs, like something like Mr. Wright, he has a clipboard with him, and whenever you catch yourself doing something, he like…. You can see him go to the clipboard and write something down, and it's not a good feeling." My field notes about the first two booster videos describe the suggestions the

Gentlemen made to teachers about how to use the Code to assess behavior. In the first video, I asked four Gentlemen participants what teachers should do if they see Gentlemen not adhering to the Code.

> They all said that adults should say something about the behavior. They seemed proud of the Code and like they wanted to be reminded to follow it. One said, "They should just be like to a student, 'Try to be kind and, as a Gentlemen, do what's right.'" Another said, "They should remind us about the Code and we should be like, 'Those are the Gentlemen's Code and maybe we should follow it.' And then that would work." It didn't seem like they were proposing that they should "get in trouble." It was more like they just wanted to be reminded so that they could apologize and get back on track.

After filming the second booster video, in which a number of sixth grade Gentlemen were asked what adults should do if they catch Gentlemen following the Code, I noted, "they seemed so proud to answer. One or two suggested that a teacher should give them material rewards for following the Code, but most just wanted a quick word of affirmation. I hope they get it!"

Cultural Relevance of the Code

In discussing PRQ3, I noted that the intervention process drew less upon cultural and linguistic differences than anticipated. Here, turning to outcomes, I consider the degree to which the resulting Code reflected greater sensitivity to cultural relevance than existing behavioral expectations (ORQ1). As discussed in Chapter 3, CRCM theory recommends clarity about the different cultural norms represented in a community, especially when determining and communicating behavior expectations (Bondy et al., 2007; Weinstein et al., 2003). Similarly, scholars of PBIS suggest intentionally aligning behavioral expectations with a student population's cultural norms (Banks & Obiakor, 2015; Greflund et al., 2014). The logic model

(Appendix C) for the present intervention lists as a short-term outcome of the articulation of culturally responsive behavioral norms (Monroe & Obidah, 2004) and, as a medium-term outcome, increased cultural responsiveness of PBIS at North (McIntosh, K. et al., 2014). ORQ1 queries the extent to which these outcomes were realized.

North's existing behavioral expectations are codified narrowly in various school rules and, more broadly, in its HOWLs (Appendix F). Both the school rules and the HOWLs were developed entirely by North faculty and staff, who are largely White and monolingual. The present research study hypothesized that a Gentlemen's Code developed by students of color, their families, and their selected allies might better reflect their cultural backgrounds and, accordingly, be more authentic to them than the schoolwide HOWLs. Outcome data clearly suggested that the Code was more authentic to the Gentlemen than the HOWLs, in relation tboth o their cultural and linguistic backgrounds and to their culture as a group.

Alumnus facilitator Abdul thought that his Somali community would see their beliefs reflected in the Code, perhaps especially in terms of Islam: "It's all about peace…. How you guys talked about how we are not fighting each other. That's something that's really strong in Islam." Alumnus facilitator Emon thought that his parents would also agree with it: "My mom, even though if she has problems with something, she always wants to give. Like, so she's not worried about her self-being. She's more about other people more." When asked if that was because of Islam, he replied, "If you really practice the faith, you'll end up like that. Because the word *Islam* means peace."

The school social worker, a White New Englander, observed that the Code reflected her own beliefs and culture and named a White Gentlemen for whom she thought it did, too. At the same time, she remembered that when she shared it with a father, he had told her that the Code is

"very Sudanese." "It's complicated," she said. She then brought up a Gentleman who can't attend after school activities, "because he has to get his sister off the bus and take care of her at night. It's [the HOWLs:] *responsibility* and *respect* and *perseverance* in a whole different context. So I wish that was in the Code somewhere." For her, the Gentlemen's Code had some sensitivity to cultural relevance and lived experience but could have had much more. As addressed earlier, she wondered if the Code was "the boys saying what they think White people want them to say"—a suspicion she held from the beginning of the project. The suspicion became stronger after two young adults of color viewed some Gentlemen videos with her and expressed concern that they were filmed and edited by me, a White man. They warned against letting White people have too much of a hand in how the Gentlemen define themselves, because that would skew the narrative to be more sensitive to White cultural expectations and biases.

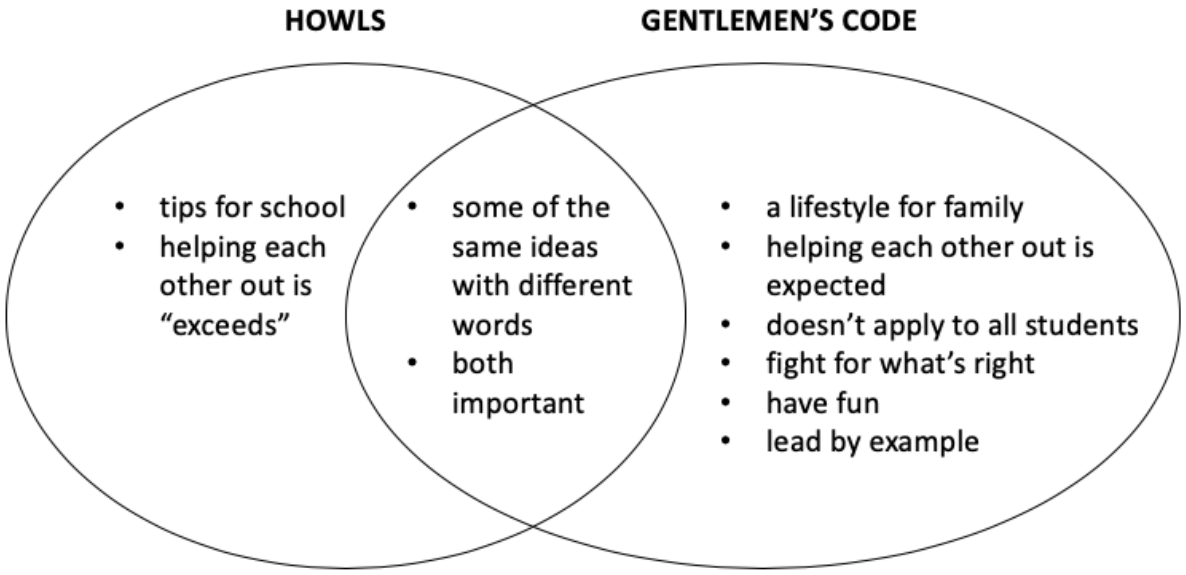
The document comparison focus group was designed to uncover ways in which the Gentlemen themselves thought that the Code was more culturally relevant to them than schoolwide behavioral language. Participants were asked to read the school HOWLs and the Gentlemen's Code. They were then asked to complete a Venn diagram comparing and contrasting the two documents. Participants appeared to find the task difficult. The high word count for both documents made parsing out textual similarities and differences a challenging task. For example, Kell, Jayce, and Adan all thought that the two documents had the same ideas in them, but they disagreed about which one was shorter and simpler. Kell had trouble identifying comparison points: "Um, is respect on there? To be kind… that's like… that's like… no. Um, 'We don't fight each other.' That would be the same as responsibility?" Bert attempted to connect *I always show up for my fellow gentlemen because we're family* with a HOWL about not missing class time unnecessarily. Abdi tried to connect *We don't fight with each other* to the

HOWLs. When asked if the admonition against fighting also appeared in the HOWLs in any form, he said, "I bet the HOWLs expect us not to fight each other," but did not notice the bold-faced HOWLs target *I use my body safely*. Reegan wasn't certain whether following either document fully would mean that he was automatically following the other one: "Not always…. Actually, sometimes, maybe. Um… not sure."

As shown in the Venn Diagram that participants generated (Figure 5.1) Gentlemen ultimately identified four precepts in their Code that they thought were not expressed in the HOWLs: (a) *We fight for what's fair and right*, (b) *We know how to have fun*, (c) *I lead by example*, and (d) *We don't fight each other* (with an emphasis on *each other*). Jason noted, "If there's a fight between Gentlemen, like, most of us would try to stop it instantly." Bert agreed: "It's like in five minutes, everything's fine." Several participants also pointed out that the school HOWLs are scored on a 4-point scale in which a *3* signifies meeting the standard and a *4* signifies meeting it and helping others meet it, too. In contrast, the Gentlemen's Code, they argued, is already all about helping each other meet expectations. Adan said, "I would feel that helping each other isn't measured by a one, two, three, four scale. It's just an expectation to do overall." Jayce piped in to agree, and Adan continued: "You have to help your family grow and...." Jayce concluded: "…impact each other."

Table 5.1

Comparison of School-wide Expectations to the Gentlemen's Code



Note. Venn diagram generated by Gentlemen to compare schoolwide behavioral expectations to their Code.

Some participants thought that the Gentlemen's Code reflected their linguistic and cultural backgrounds; others seemed to argue that its relevance was specific to the culture that had formed within their group. The Gentlemen seemed keener to use the Code to articulate what the group itself meant to them (and between them) than to strengthen connections to their home culture or racial and ethnic identities. The most emphatic observations made in the document comparison focus group were about the fact that the Gentlemen's Code was *theirs.* Muhsin called it "family rules" and "a lifestyle." Kell said that the Code is important to him, "because [the Code is] more like family. [HOWLs] is more like school." Bert said, "I think [the Code] is better, cuz we wrote it." Jason believed "if you show this to somebody, like another student, they probably won't get the meaning of it. They probably won't understand the whole entire, like, thing of it." Reegan agreed: "It's kind of unique to be a Gentleman." He said that he was proud

of the Code because, "it's kind of something that not a lot of other people, like students, do."

I explained that the North adults had hoped that the HOWLs would have the same kind of significance to the whole school that the Code seemed to have to these Gentlemen. Bert observed that "it would be kind of nice if like [the HOWLs] meant more to us, because it would probably be easier for us to, you know, get good HOWLs in school." However, he didn't think it possible for an entire school to identify as intimately with the HOWLs as the Gentlemen could with their own Code: "Obviously 500 people aren't going to all get along and have the same views on everything. So that means that it's going to be harder to have a 500-person family." With around 20 active Gentlemen in each grade level, cultural cohesion seemed to him much more possible.

Permeation of the Code into the School Community

One of the short-term outcomes hypothesized in the Logic Model (Appendix C) was *recurring reference to the Code by Gentlemen, families, and faculty/staff*. ORQ2 examined the incidents in which and purposes for which the Gentlemen's Code was referenced by stakeholders during Trimester 2. Trimester 1 was envisioned as a drafting and development period and Trimester 2 as the trimester during which the Code would be integrated into the fabric of the community. Nonetheless, it helps to begin by sharing some examples from field notes of early references to the Code during Trimester 1. For the most part, these were tentative references on the part of myself and the school social worker, as we attempted to find a respectful, appropriate way in which to reference the Code with Gentlemen, their families, and faculty and staff.

Trimester 1. On the October day that the final draft of the Code was shared out with the Gentlemen, the school social worker had two students who had just had a physical fight with each other read it with two other Gentlemen. They pointed out the precept, "We don't fight with each other." She thanked them for pointing that out and said, "This is what we hope to be. We're

not always perfect." Five days later, two other Gentlemen had a smaller physical altercation. I showed them the video version of the Code and asked if anything applied to this situation. They pointed out the same precept and, when left alone to talk things out, were able to come to resolution and return to class. It appeared that both the Gentlemen and the school social worker felt most comfortable with the Code when treating it as aspirational instead of as a strict code of conduct. In other words, it felt better to frame the Code as something Gentlemen work toward instead of saying that a Gentleman has to follow it perfectly at all times.

In two other October instances in which Gentlemen were sent to my office for a "reset" because of disruptive behavior, I utilized the Code indirectly. Rather than following the normal protocol of asking the student to identify a HOWLs target that they could reflect on, I asked if they had seen the Code presentation video yet. Neither had, although they each appeared in it. I shared it with each of them. After asking for their opinions about the editing, I took each back to class where they re-entered without incident. Whether it inspired them to strive to meet the Code or simply distracted and de-escalated them was unclear.

During the parent-teacher conferences in late October, the school social worker also shared the video and the poster with the families of Gentlemen as they stopped by her office to say hello. As mentioned earlier, one father called it "very Sudanese. We take care of our own problems." Meanwhile, one faculty member approached the school social worker to complain of Gentlemen's behavior, exclaiming, "That video is a sham!" A community ally of the Gentlemen had recently warned the school social worker that affording the Gentlemen extra visibility and power in the form of a Code would trigger a backlash. She began to worry that the prediction was coming true.

By the end of the first trimester, there were early signs that the Gentlemen themselves

might reference the Code of their own accord. One asked for a copy of the poster for his bedroom. Another urged a fellow Gentleman to "go look at the Code!" after that Gentleman attempted to start a fight. Second trimester references to the Code were captured in part in my field notes and in part through the group interviews.

Trimester 2. This section, covering the second trimester, begins with chronologically-presented anecdotes from my researcher field notes and concludes with anecdotes recounted in the group interviews. According to field notes, December and early January were characterized by continued situational references to the Code by myself and the school social worker, but not typically by other staff or students. In early December, while hanging up posters of the Code and filming the second booster video, one Gentleman called another Gentleman "garbage," and a third said, "Hey, look right here on the poster. We are kind!" This was the only documented student-initiated reference to the Code in that time frame. The school social worker and I, however, were still referencing the Code. In mid-December, for example, Saul had an argument with a peer and started pushing him. When I asked him which part of the Gentlemen's Code applied to the situation, he could not remember, but identified "I am kind" when asked to review the poster. A week later, the school social worker and I had a meeting with Saul's father and shared the Code with him. The school social worker told the father that the Gentlemen refer to and feel connected to the Code and that she was surprised and would have written something different herself. The father took a copy of the Code home to scaffold a conversation with his son.

In another instance, Kade was sent to the office after lying to a teacher about a behavior that the teacher had confirmed. I asked him to see if anything in the Code applied. He identified *I own my mistakes and learn from them.* The school social worker was present and reminded Kade

that he had himself asked a peer to go look at the Code just the prior week. The following day, Kade was back in the office. I asked him to look at the Code again and pick a precept or two on which he would be interested in improving. He reflected that he avoids owning his mistakes in order to avoid getting in trouble. He also said that he could do a better job of leading by example. In the same time period, Charles made a sexually inappropriate joke in class and unconvincingly pretended not to understand the innuendo involved. In conferencing with him and the teacher, I invoked the *I own my mistakes and learn from them* precept from the Code, suggesting that mistakes happen, and that being honest about them provides a path forward. In a unique twist on this theme, the school social worker met with a White Gentleman with robust disciplinary involvement to say that he was not meeting the expectations of a Gentleman because he had not been following her directions. She did not reference the Code and, in seeming contradiction to her frequent assertion that one cannot get kicked out of the Gentlemen, told him that he could not participate in the Gentlemen for the rest of the year.

Few teachers appeared to be referencing the Code with their students in this time period, and an early-January walkthrough of all the classrooms revealed that only a handful had hung up the Code poster that had been placed in their mailbox two weeks prior. One White teacher, however, had redesigned the poster to be more visually appealing, and had shared that version with some colleagues. The school social worker asked him that the Gentlemen lead any further redesigns. By early January, the school social worker had also started to noticeably distance herself from the Code. One day, two Gentlemen were sent to the office for arguing and swinging at each other. I was unavailable, and the school social worker helped them resolve the conflict and go back to class. By regular school practice, they would typically have been removed to in-school suspension for the day. When I asked the school social worker about it, she replied,

"That's what they do"—meaning that they argue but then work it out quickly. I replied, "We don't swing on each other." The social worker agreed verbally, but her face indicated frustration. It reminded me that *We don't fight with each other* was one of two precepts in the Code that came not from the Gentlemen's own words. It was added by adults to counterbalance to *We fight for what's fair and right,* which was proposed by an alumnus. In fact, throughout the study, the Gentlemen were more likely to express the sentiment that, if they fight, they stop it and restore quickly than to suggest that they don't fight with each other.

Two days later, two recent college graduates who are also African immigrants visited under the auspices of a local youth empowerment non-profit organization. They met with Gentlemen, Fierce Girls, and the school social worker. They questioned the propriety of including White students in the groups and of having a White person filming and editing the videos about the Gentlemen. They also questioned whether the Code represents what the Gentlemen truly believe, or merely what they think White people want them to believe. This meeting was a turning point in the intervention process. It validated concerns that the school social worker had about the Code and left me more tentative and cautious about the Code. At a mid-January faculty meeting, the school social worker said aloud to the assembled adults that she regretted the Code, wondering if it might be a tool to appease the teachers rather than to empower the Gentlemen.

Nevertheless, a month later, the school social worker reported that a young Black faculty member had taken the Gentlemen to task over their behavior at a lunch meeting he was visiting. Her response was to tell the group of Gentlemen, "We need to recommit to the Code." She asked one Gentleman to read the code aloud to the group and told them that they would repeat the practice "every day." The next week, during February vacation, a group of South Sudanese

volunteers ran a three-day workshop for the Gentlemen. The social worker reported that the leader of the group had chided the Gentlemen for their behavior and that it made her wonder if respect for adults should be added to the Code. Indeed, in the final booster video, some seventh grade Gentlemen referenced the workshop and proposed increasing the emphasis on respect in the Code. As a result, the school social worker gave them a red marker to add the word "Respect" to the large Gentlemen's Code poster hanging in her office. By the mid-March end of the study period, I had noticed the Code posted in a few more classrooms bringing the total to approximately 15.

The group interviews highlighted some references to the Code that were not already captured in my field notes. Adults told stories of how both adults and students had referenced the Code in Trimester 2. The school social worker reported that Gentlemen had begun using it to orient new members to the group. She had also seen them use it as a normative tool with each other: "I've seen them look at it with each other and say 'that's not Gentlemenly' or 'he shouldn't be a Gentlemen because he's fighting.'" Ms. Darby concurred. Mr. Tyson recounted that, in February, a Gentleman with whom he had a passing connection came to him upset about a fight between several Gentlemen.

> He came to me after school, broken up about that fight and how he tried to step in. He just kept referencing the Code and how this is not what we're supposed to do. He was so articulate and so concerned about the integrity of the Gentlemen as a whole and how this makes them look… how he needed to step up and call out his friends.

Mr. Tyson and the school social worker argued that the Code carries symbolic weight for the Gentlemen. Mr. Tyson noted, "I have seen kids prideful in the fact that that's hung up in the room, especially 6th grade boys, and maybe that's just pride in being part of a club, but they're

proud that it's there." The school social worker mentioned a Gentleman alumnus who had visited the school and was glad to see the Code hanging because it was a concrete representation that the Gentlemen had become a recognized institution at North. Mr. Tyson and the school social worker then told a story of showing the Code to a sixth grader who was considering becoming a Gentleman.

> Mr. Tyson: Now it's visual, and I just think it has a lot of power. The way that kid reacted yesterday… It was priceless how he was so proud, so concerned about what he needed to make the right choice.
>
> Social Worker: I gave him 24 hours to think about it, but he [made a serious face] and then went, "No, I can do it. I want to do it." And gave a hard handshake.
>
> Mr. Tyson: Oh my god, best handshake I've ever had.
>
> Social Worker: Me too! I said "Coronavirus? Heck with that. Let's shake again!"

Finally, the group listed a few names of teachers whom they had overheard referencing the Code. Mr. Tyson indicated that others may not reference it but keep it posted in their room as a sign of allyship. The school social worker remembered one teacher bringing a group of Gentlemen into her room after they had made xenophobic jokes about a student recently immigrated from Angola.

> She brought the Code to the room. She had the Code in her hand, and she said to the room, "I feel like this is important, and this behavior we had in my class was not this." And work on it, you know. So like she said, 'I hope you work on it.' And then [a staff member of color] worked on it with them. I didn't think that was punitive. I felt like it was, "This is important. Figure it out and get on with it."

Mr. Tyson raised his lingering concern that North adults would use the Code as a tool "to break

the boys rather than raise them up." No participants offered any examples of that happening, but they did discuss adult skepticism about the Code and about the Gentlemen.

Mr. Tyson: I've heard people say that it's a joke.

Ms. Darby: It's a joke?

Mr. Tyson: Yeah. Because the kids don't follow it. Like "Why are we hanging these things around here?" They didn't know that I was around the corner. That wasn't to me.

Social Worker: Yeah, there's a hostile vibe.

Mr. Tyson: Yeah.

Ms. Levin: Is it? I mean I feel like....

Mr. Tyson: There's a minority. A vocal minority.

Ms. Darby: Of hostility?

Mr. Tyson: Yeah.

Ms. Levin: But a majority of support? [others nod] Okay. I'm just making sure I'm not living in a different reality. I feel the support.

Social Worker: It's not vocal.

Ms. Levin: The support is not vocal, but the negatives might be. Like, I always scan the room and say, "OK, supporter, supporter, supporter…" You know.

Social Worker: But the support's not vocal. Maybe that's it.

Mr. Tyson: I think the support is vocal in a safe environment, but it's not confrontational.

Ms. Levin: That's White fragility.

Mr. Tyson: Yeah, there won't be feedback to someone else.

Ms. Levin: Right. It's White solidarity. Yes, that makes sense.

In their group interview, the Gentlemen expressed few of these worries. In fact, the

Gentlemen's Code seemed like a distant memory to them, perhaps because the interview took place in a video conference three weeks into COVID-19 remote learning. Abdirashid, who had attended the initial drafting session as well as the dinner and input session said, "I've seen the Code once, but I don't really know it."

At first, when asked, they couldn't think of any times they had heard the Code referenced by teachers. Then Reegan offered, "Some people would just read it to us." Hiram recalled that once, when two Gentlemen "were kind of fighting and yelling at each other in computer class, the teacher said to follow the Gentlemen's Code." He also mentioned another teacher, an African immigrant: "If I am not following the Code, he shows me the paper." Reegan remembered the February vacation workshop with the South Sudanese young adults. He remembered that the leader "said we should add Respect to the Code." He paused for a moment. "He could be strict, but he could be nice." Because of the COVID-19 closure of our school building the day after the intervention trimester ended, the timing, venue, and attendance of the Gentlemen's group interview all limited the student perceptual data available to answer ORQ2, but the data it did provide suggested that the Gentlemen did not feel that the Code was referenced regularly during Trimester 2.

Shifts in Gentlemen's Perception of the Group

Thirteen Gentlemen participated in the survey of perceptions about the Gentlemen before the intervention; nine also completed it after the intervention. The results of these surveys suggest that perceptions remained stable and positive across the study period. All responses in both survey administrations were wholly positive. *Good behavior* and *belonging and support* were by far the dominant emergent themes in responses both in number of references and in percent coverage of the transcript text.

References to good behavior touched on a number of sub-themes. In both surveys, the Gentlemen repeatedly referred to themselves as "kind," "nice," and "respectful." Several respondents in each survey also argued that Gentlemen are students who "do their work." In the preintervention perceptual survey, one Gentleman described the Gentlemen as "responsible, respectful, perserverant," alluding to North's three schoolwide behavioral tenets. In the postintervention survey administration, one respondent brought up the Gentlemen's Code: "It teaches them to be a gentlemen and they must follow the Code."

Themes of belonging and support remained consistent across both surveys. The Gentlemen described themselves both before and after the intervention as a group "who work together," "who support each other," "who stand up for one another," and who "become a family." In the first survey, one respondent wrote, "The Gentlemen's group is about having your friend's back no matter what, even though they get in trouble, and being with them when they go through tough time with teachers and other peers." In the second survey, another wrote, "We help each other when we get in trouble we can finally have a people or a person to talk to when your down they can help you on homework." More strikingly, one respondent wrote after the intervention, "The gentelmens [sic] club is a group of young men who felt left out but now we don't."

One shift in responses between administrations was increased reference to overcoming issues of race and social justice—which I coded as *overcome*. In the postintervention survey, one respondent wrote, "The Gentlemen's Group is a group of black kids who feel like they aren't being treated right because of their race. It isn't just about playing basketball even though people think it is." Another alluded to the Code by writing, "the gentlemens group are a group of boys who fight for whats [sic] right." Finally, one shared in detail a vision that wove together the

themes of *good behavior*, *belonging and support*, and *overcome*.

> The Gentlemen is a group of boys that support each other and try to be role models for other kids in the school. We eat lunch play basketball together and talk about issues going on that we can find solutions to make it better. The gentlemen's group is a very diverse group we have kids that come from all around the world and speak different languages. We participate in clubs that talk strongly about race, like the book club.[6] If I can relate to any other club like gentlemen's it would probably be the boys and girls club.[7]

This slight increase in connecting the group to themes of race, ethnicity, and social justice could be attributed to the intervention, but may well also be attributable to expected psychosocial growth in the middle school years (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, & Medicine, 2019).

Shifts in Adult Perception of the Gentlemen

From among approximately 70 faculty and staff, 48 participated in the preintervention survey and 43 in the postintervention survey. The results suggest that faculty and staff perceptions of the Gentlemen, the subject of ORQ4, did not markedly improve over the course of the invention but did gain detail and nuance.

Table 5.3 shows my holistic characterization of each triad of survey answers in terms of positive, mixed, negative, or neutral perceptions of the Gentlemen as individuals and of the group's impact on members.

[6] Referencing a race-themed after school book club that had recently been held at the school by a local humanities organization.

[7] The Boys and Girls Club is a popular afterschool destination for multilingual youth and youth of color from North and neighboring schools.

Table 5.3

Researcher Characterization of Faculty and Staff Respondent's Perceptions of the Gentlemen

	Perception of Individuals		Perception of Impact of Group	
Response	Pre (*n* =48)	Post (*n* =43)	Pre (*n* =48)	Post (*n* =43)
Positive	12	11	25	22
Mixed	28	27	17	16
Negative	6	2	6	3
Neutral	2	3	0	2

An example of a positive triad was as follows.

1) [It is] a group for young men to help them process the challenges of adolescence. It gives them a sense of identity, belonging, and a feeling that they are not alone in these challenges. The basketball activities give them a structured outlet at the end of the day.
2) The gentlemen are reflective and supportive boys who want to be successful.
3) It has a huge impact. The ability to have tough discussions with adults and have a friend alongside you is huge. With a nearly all White staff, it is important for kids of color to feel like they have someone in their court that understands their perspective.

An example of a neutral triad was as follows.

1) [They are] male students, usually of color.
2) They can sometimes be a rowdy group working toward appropriate behaviors.
3) Hopefully the impact would be how to behave in situations and to properly advocate for themselves.

Holistic characterization of faculty and staff responses appeared generally stable before and after the intervention. Only a minority in either administration expressed wholly negative or neutral perceptions. Respondents in both administrations generally expressed a more positive impression

of the Gentlemen as a program than of the Gentlemen themselves as individuals.

Some subtle shifts appeared during thematic coding. Postintervention responses were longer, more complex, and more likely to merit multiple codes than preintervention responses. Table 5.4 lists the diverse themes that emerged from iterative thematic coding, along with sample quotes to illustrate.

Table 5.4

Emergent Themes in Faculty and Staff Perceptions of the Gentlemen

Thematic Code	Sample Quotes
Belonging and Support	It gives them a family here. They are to have each other's backs.
Good Behavior	Respectful, kind, inclusive, mature, positive role models.
Coddled and Entitled	Some of them become entitled by being in this group and feel that school rules no longer apply to them.
Students Vary	They are very diverse. Some are outgoing, some are introverts. They can be very polite or struggle greatly with polite behavior.
Accountability	A group of tweens and teens who learn to hold themselves and their friends accountable for their actions.
Students Grow	I've seen the boys mature in a way that is beneficial to them and their community.
Impact Varies	I would say it depends on the student. I see a wide range of impacts from positive to cockiness.
Poor Behavior	Often disrespectful; not rule followers.
Overcome	They fight for what is right and stand up to adversity.
At-Risk	The gentleman are mostly Black boys who might be at risk students.

I tabulated reference counts for each code as well as coverage percentages indicating the

proportion of response text related to each code. Shifts in these tabulations from before to after the intervention suggested which themes to consider more deeply. One such difference between administrations was reference to belonging and support. The number of references increased from 31 to 52, suggesting a possible increased awareness of a major purpose of the group. As one respondent wrote after the intervention,

> It provides these individuals an opportunity to be around others who look, feel, and think similarly or can empathize with their point of view. In many cases, these students may have a hard time seeing themselves reflected in the world around them. This group provides support in a safe and nurturing environment. Most importantly, the impact is a sense of belonging.

Sense of belonging may be important for all students, but faculty and staff seemed to have a slightly stronger sense after the intervention that belonging holds a particular importance for boys of color. Before the intervention, no respondents identified the group as a part of North's systems of tiered interventions, but six postintervention respondents explicitly termed it a Tier 2 intervention. Another related shift in responses was that reference to the Gentlemen overcoming adversity increased from two to 13. "They fight for what is right and stand up to adversity," wrote one respondent, echoing one of the Code's precepts. A second referred to schools as historically "restrictive, and even abusive, for students of color." A third described the group as giving "boys of color a safe space/break from the white world they live in." Still another identified the group as "POWERFUL social justice work and [the school social worker] is to thank for it. I dread working in a place where this group will cease to exist."

The first administration of the survey yielded 11 references to good behavior and 11 to poor behavior. The second administration yielded 24 and 6, respectively. This could indicate an

improvement in perceptions. Nonetheless, the earlier holistic analysis of response triads and a careful read of responses shows that most respondents, both before and after the intervention, perceived mixed behavior from the Gentlemen. "Some are really kind and follow the Gentlemen mission," observed one respondent, "but others don't follow the mission and can be very bad role models for others." Another echoed that: "Some are very studious, hardworking, polite and others are rude, entitled, and combative." Similar sentiments were repeated many times in both administrations. Some faculty and staff respondents made a point to normalize that variation. "Like any group," one wrote, "the Gentlemen are varied." Another described "a wide range of attributes and behaviors exhibited by the gentlemen just as there is in the school population." A third wrote, "The gentlemen are boys striving to be men. They are human. They may make mistakes, but they are moving forward. They are not perfect; no one is."

Other respondents resisted normalizing varied behaviors. They laid the blame on the school social worker for coddling Gentlemen and encouraging in them a sense of entitlement. Some respondents, for example, described the Gentlemen's Group as an "escape" from accountability. "[They] can have a mindset that school rules don't apply to them," argued one. "It shields them from the reality that their actions should and will have consequences later in life," argued another. One postintervention response helps elaborate this viewpoint.

> For some of the boys, I think being a Gentleman gives them a sense of belonging because they have a group that they are a part of within the school. I'm sure this helps them feel connected across grade level and lets them know that someone will always have their back. For others I think being a part of this group gives them a sense of entitlement. Some of these boys will often throw out the phrase, "...but I'm a Gentleman" as an answer for why they should get to do something or have preferential treatment in a given

> situation. I think many of them abuse this title and do not live up to the guidelines laid out by the group. Many that I've seen, run to [the school social worker's] office when they don't get their way or when they are sent out of class and told to go to the office. I definitely think that they are catered to differently and disciplined less as a Gentlemen. At the very least, I feel they are given many more chances (in terms of bad behavior) if they are a member of this group.

A second postintervention response phrased a similar sentiment:

> Predominantly, the gentlemen are great kids, looking to spend time with one another after school and bettering their situations. Many gentlemen utilize the program to find success in the classroom and community, while others may manipulate their involvement in the group to spend time out of the classroom. The few that manipulate this program can hurt the overall intention of the Gentlemen, causing confusion amongst teachers and unfortunately clouding the purpose.

Although a number of respondents saw the group as a way to escape accountability, postintervention responses included four references to the Gentlemen's Code, and 16 assertions that the group increases accountability. An important nuance was that these references focused on mutual accountability as opposed to accountability from above. "The Gentlemen hold themselves to a high standard of conduct," observed one respondent, "and know that when they aren't meeting that standard, their peers will call them on it and support them in meeting that standard." Another asserted the importance of peer-centered accountability:

> They hold each other to high standards... they make mistakes, like ALL kids, but they have internal systems within which to hold each other accountable, which matter way more than anything the school or the adults in it can accomplish.

Another respondent cast the accountability not so much as *mutual* as *collective*:

> The group works to keep each other accountable, it gives each member a sense of belonging, and allows each boy to have an "off" day because he knows his group members will be there to pick-up the slack and help support him.

Although overall faculty and staff perceptions of the Gentlemen as individuals remained mainly mixed to positive across the intervention and perceptions of the Gentlemen as a group remained mainly positive to mixed, there were some possible subtle shifts in appreciation of the value of belonging and mutual support for boys of color, in moderation of the minority stance that the group is harmful to members and to the school, and in interest in the idea of intra-group accountability.

Changes in Referrals

One long-term goal of this study's intervention stated in the logic model (Appendix C) was to reduce the number of disciplinary referrals for Gentlemen. Table 5.5 contains descriptive statistics regarding referrals for Gentlemen and for all students who were not Gentlemen. It also shows the results of the Related-Samples Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test. Descriptive statistics show that Gentlemen had higher mean and median referrals than other students in all time periods, and that both Gentlemen and all other students showed declines in referrals across each time interval. The Wilcoxon results showed, however, that the only significant decline was for all other students between Pre_1 and Post. All effect sizes, significant or not, were negligible. Power analysis for significance of .05 and power of .9 to find an effect size of .5 or greater prescribed a minimum sample of 47. This condition was met in all cases except the comparison of Gentlemen referrals between the Pre_1 and Post periods.

Table 5.5

Changes in Disciplinary Referrals

Referrals by Group and Period				Related-Samples Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test		
Variable	Pre_1	Pre_2	Post	Variable	Pre_1-Post	Pre_2-Post
Gentlemen				Gentlemen		
Mdn	1.00	1.00	1.00	*n*	25	57
M	2.62	1.58	1.44	*p*	.675	.788
SD	3.98	2.90	2.14	*r*	-.08	-.09
All Others				All Others		
Mdn	.00	.00	.00	*n*	278	453
M	.72	.36	.33	*p*	.017*	.627
SD	1.81	1.44	1.03	*r*	-.14	.02

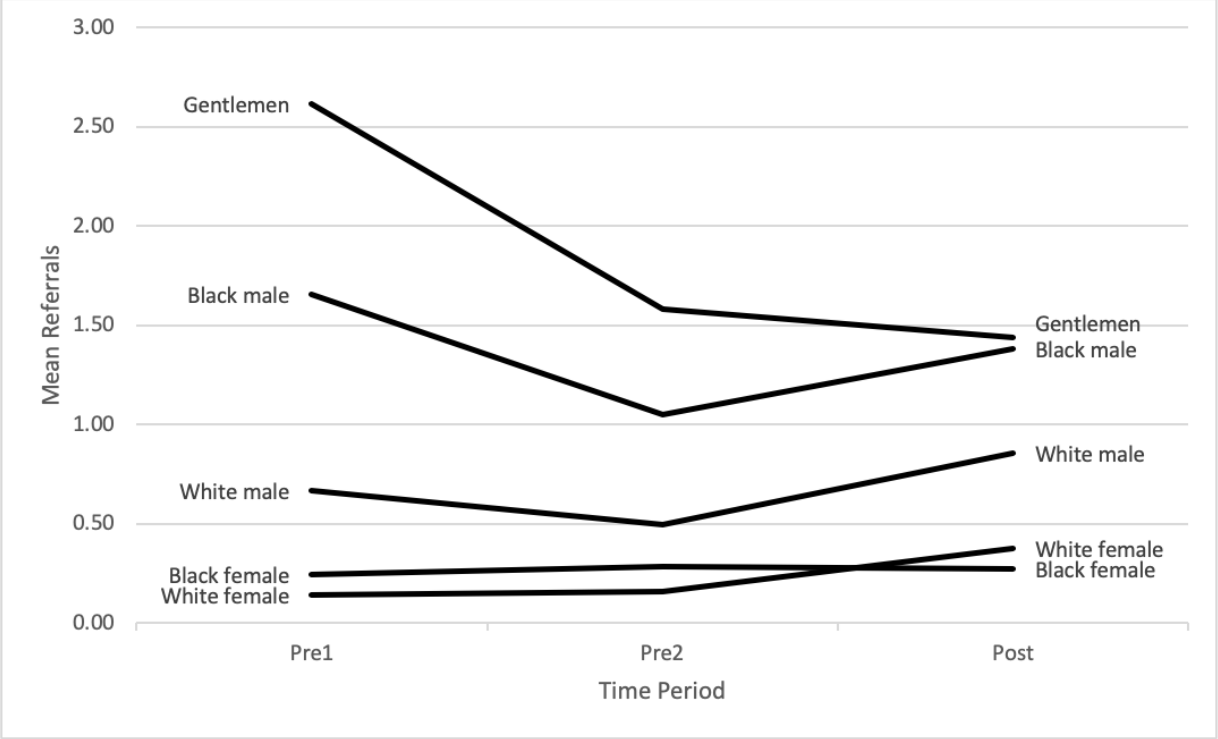
Note: Pre_1 = Trimester 2, 2018-2019; Pre_2 = Trimester 1, 2019-2020; Post = Trimester 2, 2019-2020; $r = z/\sqrt{N}$

* Significantly different at $p \leqq .05$

I performed further descriptive analysis to explore underlying trends. Figure 5.2 shows mean referrals for each time period for five groups: Black females, White females, Black males, White males, and Gentlemen. The most visible decreases (and diminishments of the discipline gap) are for Gentlemen and Black males between the two control periods, so could not be attributed to the intervention.

Figure 5.2

Mean Referrals by Time Period and Group



Some scholarship suggests that Black students are more likely to be referred for subjective offenses such as defiance, disrespect, and disruption (Skiba et al., 2002), so I also calculated the percentage of Gentlemen referrals listed under SWIS's defiance, disrespect, and disruption categories in each time period. The share of total referrals for Gentlemen in those categories, as defined by SWIS, was, in order of time period, 57%, 51%, and 45%, showing nominal decreases across the three time periods. Analysis of shifts in other offense categories showed little change for Gentlemen. One accidental finding of the analysis was that, in the discipline data, five of the top ten most-referred students were Iraqi-American, who register as White in North's student information system and, thus, in the analysis. Removing Arab students from the White dataset would spell an even larger discipline gap between White and Black students at North.

Conclusion and Discussion

The intervention in this research study was intended to help an existing group focused on boys of color develop a culturally responsive behavioral code that might mitigate the effects of bias and cultural difference on their selection for disciplinary referral. The findings detailed above paint a picture of an intervention that had some but not all of its intended impact, at least within the implementation time frame of two trimesters.

Stakeholder participation was robust for Gentlemen as well as for faculty and staff. Outside community allies also contributed. Family participation, though, was lower than desired. Participants highlighted three particularly useful qualities of the collaboration: (a) the process treated students as experts and interpreters, (b) activities were structured around equitable student-adult relationships in which power was shared, and (c) the Gentlemen were able to have fun in the activities. Although the intervention process privileged the voices of minority and multilingual students and families, family participation was minimal and the students themselves tended not to draw explicitly on their families' cultural and linguistic background in any of the activities.

One anticipated outcome for the intervention was that the Gentlemen's Code would be more culturally relevant than existing schoolwide expectations. The Code differed from the HOWLs in its emphasis on fun, family, and mutual support and advocacy. These emphases may well draw on linguistic and cultural backgrounds as well as on the lived experience of being marginalized on the basis of race/ethnicity. Some respondents recognized cultural connections within the Code; others saw the Code as explicitly relevant to being a Gentleman—as emblematic of the culture that they had developed as a group over the course of four years. They expressed no quarrel with published schoolwide expectations, but they felt more pride in and connection to the Gentlemen's Code simply because it was theirs.

Another anticipated outcome for the intervention was that the Gentlemen's Code would become a part of everyday discourse at North, at least for the Gentlemen and the adults who worked with them. In practice, though, references to the Code outside of intervention activities were sporadic. Approximately a third of teachers ultimately posted the Code in their classrooms, but participants did not report frequent references to the code in milieu. Some adult participants worried that the Code reflected what the Gentlemen thought White teachers wanted to hear and that White teachers would use it as a tool for controlling the Gentlemen. There were no student complaints, however, that the latter happened. Many participants, adult and youth, advocated that the Code should be seen as aspirational and as a tool for reminders instead of as a pretext for punishment.

Gentlemen self-perceptions remained wholly positive across the study period. Faculty and staff perceptions of the Gentlemen remained mixed but seemed to evolve in nuance. I detected no intervention effects on the number of referrals received by Gentlemen—a hypothesized long-term outcome of the intervention. Nor were there clear indications of a closing of discipline gaps as a result of the intervention.

Limitations

This research study had numerous limitations. Methodological shortcomings may have limited its ability to detect the impacts of the intervention. Additionally, the potential impacts were mediated and moderated by a complex network of social interactions, which may at times have limited the intervention's impact. Finally, conceptual shortcomings threatened both the study's clarity and its impact. I discuss each group of limitations in turn below.

Limitations on detection. This study had a number of limitations that threaten its sensitivity to results. Qualitative trustworthiness (Krefting, 1991) was threatened by lack of

interrater validation in the thematic coding process and by a survey design that was perhaps not robust enough to discern shifts in stakeholder perceptions about the Gentlemen. Statistical conclusion validity (Shadish et al., 2002) was threatened by low power in one of the key quantitative comparisons—referral count for Gentlemen in Trimesters 2 of 2018-2019 and 2019-2020. Finally, multiple treatment interference (Petursdottir & Carr , 2018)—also termed contamination (Baranowski & Stables, 2000)—may have threatened internal validity. A number of initiatives took place in 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 that had direct or indirect relevance to the problem of practice. These included districtwide and schoolwide equity trainings, voluntary equity book groups and courses, and a deliberate increase in staffing of color at North. They also included additional activities of the Gentlemen and Fierce Girls: for instance, multiple short-term engagements with community mentors operating independently or under the aegis of local non-profit organizations. Equity is an established top-three strategic goal for both North and its district, though, and such confounding initiatives were both inevitable and welcome.

Limitations related to social network. One set of potential limits on impact stemmed from the interpersonal complexities of a collaborative intervention. These are too intricate and wide-ranging to exhaustively catalog, but the framework of network theory (Neal, J. W. & Neal, 2013) can help organize a cursory examination. Network theory, as described in Chapter 1, is an ecological model that frames actors as nodes embedded within multiple settings of social interaction, each node and setting in a reciprocally causal network in which any node could influence or be influenced by nodes in the same or other settings. Potential limitations on impact could stem from any of those interactions. For example, my own network connection with the Gentlemen throughout the intervention was complicated by my multiple roles: disciplinarian, advocate, and researcher. In all three roles, I have observed myself at times acting from bias.

That likely made it confusing for the Gentlemen whether or not to trust me and the intervention. It underscores the concern voiced by several adult participants that the Gentlemen may have generated a Code that reflected their presumptions about what White adults expected of them. I may have also increased the Gentlemen's sense of marginalization by focusing the intervention on their own behavioral commitments instead of on the bias they identified in adults. That sense of marginalization could have further eroded positive impact. One connection that merited expanding was between the Gentlemen and the alumni facilitators and community volunteer facilitator. These Black mentors to the Gentlemen had different positionality than me, and they could have played an even greater role in study design and execution.

My network connection with the school social worker was fraught throughout. After all, she founded the Gentlemen in part to protect boys of color from inequitable application of behavioral expectations by school administration. Furthermore, I consider her my teacher but am also her supervisor. We both attract a great deal of critical feedback from the school community and sometimes field complaints about each other. We pressure each other to modify our respective approaches in tacit exchange for advocating for each other with stakeholders. In the context of the study, I depended vitally on her as the gatekeeper to the Gentlemen, and her own connection with the Gentlemen influenced how they engaged with the intervention. For better or for worse, her shifting beliefs about the intervention throughout the study appeared to have limited their integration of the Code into their everyday school life.

Similarly, the school social worker's connections and my connections to faculty and staff appeared to limit integration of the Code into daily discourse at North. The school social worker often asserts that our school is not safe for boys of color. Her colleagues sometimes react defensively and dismiss her work. Even those who expressed excitement about the intervention,

however, were left unclear about how to engage with it. In intervention presentations, neither the school social worker nor I offered clear instructions to faculty and staff on how to interact with the final Code. Instead, we expressed our own worries and uncertainty about it. I also likely limited intervention impact by avoiding holding North adults accountable for the problem of practice. I was afraid of confronting teachers directly about their biases and eroding my relationship with them. Aside from one slide in a presentation at a faculty meeting, I did not force them to confront the Gentlemen's needs assessment claims of biased disciplinary treatment. Instead, I designed the intervention around the Leaders Council's notion that disparities might stem somewhat innocently from cultural difference.

Finally, connections to families may have played a role in limiting outcomes. Although some Gentlemen families have complained of discriminatory discipline, they have at least as often complained that North has lax expectations for their children. Because they are largely immigrants, however, their own understandings of American school culture and awareness of discrimination in that setting might be limited. Gentlemen also may not be fully transparent with them about their school experiences. It is important to note that my connection to Gentlemen families most frequently stems from disciplinary intervention, which could have had a chilling effect on their engagement. The school social worker, as described earlier, also has her own questions about which family and community members to engage when, and for what purposes. Robust family participation in the intervention might have required greater bridging of linguistic and cultural differences and greater sensitivity to the practical and emotional aspects of engagement for families of color (Scharff et al., 2010).

Conceptual limitations. Another set of limitations related to the conceptual underpinnings of the research study. First, as lead disciplinarian, I have ultimate power over

disciplinary outcomes, yet the intervention focused on actors other than me. This meant I was looking to others, especially students, to take responsibility for something that was arguably my responsibility. A more direct intervention might have focused more on my own policies and practices. That would, however, have raised difficult empirical-epistemological questions about research design. Second, my conceptual framework was general and did not explicate the specific structures at North that could perpetuate inequities such as discipline disparities. Although it discussed school climate and racial and gender bias, a more robust description of secondary factors could have used the rubric of structural racism. The Aspen Institute (2016) defines structural racism as

> A system in which public policies, institutional practices, cultural representations, and other norms work in various, often reinforcing ways to perpetuate racial group inequity. It identifies dimensions of our history and culture that have allowed privileges associated with "whiteness" and disadvantages associated with "color" to endure and adapt over time. (para. 1)

One example of structural racism described in the literature is tracking, which disproportionately benefits White students, reinforces racial heirarchy, and shapes attitudes toward students (Hardie & Tyson, K., 2013; Tyson, K., Darrity, & Castellino, 2005). In the same way, gifted programs tend to reinforce racial hierarchy (Tyson, K., 2013), even when they take ostensible measures not to (Giessman, Gambrell, & Stebbins, 2013). Although standardized testing is commonly presented as a safeguard against educational inequity (e.g., No Child Left Behind, 2002), it is also described as a tool of structural racism (e.g., Blaisdell, 2015). Additionally, although this research study conceptualized differential selection and differential processing for discipline as a symptom of bias or, at the very least, of cultural difference, others assert that they are, in fact,

structural tools for maintaining inequity (Hardie & Tyson, K., 2013).

These are merely selected examples of the mechanisms of structural racism, but they suggest an array of North policies, practices, and norms that could have been integrated into the conceptual framework. For instance, North offers an accelerated mathematics track, provides consultation to teachers from gifted-talented specialists, prepares students for and administers state-mandated standardized tests, and engages, this study argues, in differential disciplinary selection and processing. Under its current principal, North has attempted to dismantle some aspects of structural racism. In the last three years, it has removed barriers to accelerated mathematics participation, shifted gifted-talented consultation to focus on all students, eliminated dress code clauses perceived as racially charged, and increased faculty and staff diversity. This research study was conceived as part of that overall agenda. Because, however, its conceptual framework did not emphasize school-based structures, neither the needs assessment nor the intervention and its evaluation fully engaged the role of structural racism in the problem of practice.

This conceptual shortcoming not only limited the potential impact of the intervention, it also raises the likelihood that the intervention served to distract attention from and even reinforce structural racism. For example, my acceptance of the Leaders Council interest in the notion of cultural difference as a secondary factor in the problem of practice gave adults an out to plausibly deny racism. As Jessica Halliday Hardie and Karolyn Tyson write in their ethnographic examination of one Southern high school, "What tools of plausible deniability mask from view are the forces of institutional boundary making" (2013, p. 86). They observed, for example, community members using openly racist students as foils to claim their own lack of racism. They also observed that differential discipline was paradoxically justified on merit of prior behavior.

They saw something at that high school that may be inferred at North: "Institutional structures and behaviors that perpetuated racial inequality within the school were masked by whites' color-blindness and fear of being labeled racist" (p. 97). Indeed, my own hesitance to challenge my and my faculty and staff's White fragility, protected what Mills (1997) calls a "racial contract" to maintain a structure in which Whites are privileged and others are marginalized.

Implications for Research

Despite the limitations of this research study, it may have relevance to researchers interested in the problem of practice. First, it helps fill several gaps in the literature noted within the synthesis in Chapter 3. Models for effective classroom management often ignore issues of cultural diversity, and the literature on multicultural education often ignores classroom management (Weinstein et al., 2004). One of the clearest attempts to bridge that, CRCM (Weinstein et al., 2003) remains largely theoretical and under-operationalized (Patish, 2016). Similarly, within a prominent model for school behavior management, PBIS (Sugai & Horner, 2009), some have called for incorporation of culturally relevant practices (Lustick, 2017) and greater stakeholder involvement in crafting behavioral norms (Baker & Ryan, 2014; McIntosh, K. et al., 2014). However, evidence-based guidance for how that might work is scarce. The present study helps fill those gaps, if not by presenting evidence that this intervention had its desired impact, at least by presenting a rich description of the implementation of an evidence-based intervention. The study also provides a literature-based conceptual framework (Figure 1.2) of causes and factors in discipline disparities that, despite its inadequate explication of structural racism, may still represent an enhancement and clarification of Gregory et al.'s (2010) often-cited framework. Finally, this study provides evidence that the discipline disparities faced by

Black American students can also impact African immigrant students, a concept underinvestigated in the literature.

Future research could attempt modifications to this study's design by taking cues from the discussion of limitations. For example, the duration of both implementation and evaluation could be extended. Another possible high leverage modification could create multiple and culturally responsive pathways for family involvement, thus potentially increasing the cultural responsiveness of the resulting statement of norms. On a similar note, the role of the facilitators of color could be expanded, especially if the researcher is White. Modifications could also include additional safeguards so that student participants do not feel pressure to propose norms they assume to be socially desirable and include pathways for students to teach adults how they wish for them to interact with collaboratively generated norms. Finally, a modified intervention could generate norms for adult behavior in addition to or instead of norms for student behavior.

Several novel themes emerged from this study's process and outcome evaluations, which could ground additional research explorations. Researchers could further investigate the role of *having fun* in student-adult collaborations, which emerged as a perceived helpful attribute of the intervention. They could also investigate and compare the contrasting roles that younger and older mentors from family or community play for marginalized students. Third, further research could consider more deeply the difference between using behavioral norms as frames for behavioral reminders and using them as levers for disciplinary action. Finally, close analysis of discipline data in this study highlighted that Iraqi immigrants at North Middle School may experience discipline disparities equal to or worse than those experienced by their Black peers. This could be a subject for future research in contexts with significant Arab immigrant populations.

Implications for Practice

The overrepresentation of Black males in school discipline raises many concerns about equity in schools (Gregory et al., 2010; Losen & Gillespie, 2012; Noguera, 2003). The problem is pervasive and not unique to North (Anyon et al., 2014; McFadden, Marsh, Price, & Hwang, 1992; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002; Skiba et al., 2011). It is charged along ideological lines (Ujifusa, 2018) and inspired starkly different directives to schools from the Obama and Trump administrations (U.S. Department of Education & U.S. Department of Justice, 2014, 2018a, 2018b). This research study aligns with the Obama administration directive to prioritize remediation of such disparities. Lessons learned from this research study may have relevance to other schools and educational agencies also working to mitigate discipline disparities. Practitioners can take from it at least three things: (a) insights about the experiences of African immigrant students; (b) conceptual clarity that behavior, selection, and processing might each contribute independently to discipline disparities; and (c) an accounting and evaluation of one attempt to use student-adult collaboration to generate culturally responsive behavioral norms. I am also taking from this research study some personal lessons about my approach to the problem of practice.

My intervention literature review found evidence-based interventions that might directly mitigate adult racial and gender bias in discipline (e.g., Cook et al., 2018; Mendoza et al., 2010), but I made a strategic choice to focus this research study's intervention instead on student behavioral norms. My literature review suggested that successful student-adult collaborations avoid direct attacks on teacher practice (Mitra, 2003), and I worried that the related phenomena of self-serving cognitive distortion and White Fragility (Barriga et al., 2000; DiAngelo, 2011) predicted adult rejection of any intervention that directly targeted the adult role in differential

selection for disciplinary referral. Looking back at that decision reminds me that Helms (1990) identifies an early stage in White racial identity development, the pseudoindependence stage, in which attempts at anti-racist action are paternalistic and focused on changing the other instead of focused on changing those with inherited power. Helms also names an even less progressed stage—reintegration—in which we adapt to initial awareness of racial issues by idealizing ourselves and refusing accountability for our own behavior. Perhaps seeing both of these tendencies in me, the community volunteer facilitator offered some guidance early in the intervention process: "There will be values embedded in the Gentlemen's Code that can be reflected in school policies, practices and culture. This aspect of the project may be further down the road, but I wanted to be explicit [about it]" (personal communication, July 19, 2019). My understanding of that guidance has deepened.

In Chapter 1's statement of positionality, I flagged several concerns I wished to bear in mind during the research study. One was that I would benefit from the Gentlemen's labor by attaining a doctorate, thus increasing my own power whether the research benefitted the Gentlemen or not. After all, "If privileges achieved by individuals at the expense of others consititute an act of oppression, then educational research achieved by individuals at the expense of others is also an act of oppression" (Tyson, C. A., 2006, p. 43). Another concern was that, as a White man, I might tend to reinscribe my unearned power even while attempting to upset inequitable power structures. Sullivan (2019) writes, for example, of both the importance and the difficulty of using White privilege against itself: "How can you know that using your white privilege isn't just strengthening it? …It all depends how and to what ends you use white privilege, and there is no guarantee that your use of white privilege will weaken it" (p. 7).

These were concerns I carried into the intervention, but one reader of the study reframed

them for me in a startling manner. She highlighted my decision to design an intervention based on culturally responsive student behavioral norms instead of on adult anti-bias training. The calculation I appeared to be making, she argued, was not how to intervene without reinscribing or unfairly amplifying my power. To her eye, I was actually calculating how to intervene *without giving up my power*. My job security is predicated in large part on a faculty and staff sense that student behaviors are under control and, simultaneously, that I am in solidarity—perhaps even in White solidarity (DiAngelo, 2011)—with faculty and staff. I was not willing to intervene in the ways that might have been most direct because I was not willing to upset the "balance" and cede my power.

In some ways, the intervention I selected may have even exacerbated the problem of practice. I touched in Chapter 1 on Kendi's (2019) notion of behavioral antiracism, or "making racial group behavior fictional and individual behavior real" (p. 92). By focusing the attention of the study and the attention of its participants on two heavily overlapped and racialized groups of students, Black males and the Gentlemen, I reinforced the notion of differential group behavior in the minds of both students and the adults. Kendi warns, "As long as the mind thinks there is something behaviorally wrong with a racial group, the mind can never be antiracist" (p. 104). Kendi also warns against uplift suasion, which asks "the burdened Black body to act in an upstanding manner to persuade away White racism, and punish poor Black conduct with sentences of shame for reinforcing racism, for bringing the race down" (p. 203). Lurking between the lines of my logic model was the idea that a Code would help the Gentlemen present themselves as behaviorally upstanding and, thus, calm their teachers' and administrators' bias toward differential selection.

Students should not bear alone the burden of intervening in a problem that adults are

complicit in. Research and intervention "cannot be built on the 'participants' backs' but must have a simultaneous commitment to radical social change as well as to those individuals most oppressed by social and cultural subordination" (Tyson, C. A., 2006, p. 47). Accordingly, one implication of this study for my practice is that I should turn my attention back to myself and the other adults at North. I should revisit bias-reduction strategies as potential professional development priorities. At the same time, even aiming to change adult attitudes is suspect for Kendi. Racist ideas, he argues, make people illogical and resistant to insight. Furthermore, "moral and educational suasion breathes the assumption that racist minds must be changed before racist policy, ignoring history that says otherwise" (p. 208). He cites historical examples, such as interracial marriage, where support soared after policy changes instead of before them. "Changing minds is not a movement. Critiquing racism is not activism. Changing minds is not activism. An activist produces power and policy change, not mental change" (p. 209). Having a position of power at North and direct power over disciplinary procedures, I might better leverage that power to produce changes in policy and practice rather than to change minds. This evokes Karolyn Tyson's (2013) explication of structural racism and how a commitment to dismantling it requires moving beyond personal beliefs and interactions to address institutional norms, policies, and practices that reinforce inequity.

At the adult postintervention group interview, participants tossed around an idea for having the Gentlemen create a Code for the adults at North—an aspirational list of ways they would like to be treated and supported by teachers and administrators. Although not a full policy in the spirit of Kendi's advice, such a list could have normative power that didn't rely on changing minds. If school administration instituted some version of this adult Code as normative policy, that would be a true student-adult collaboration. "This year's sixth grade Gentlemen

could [write it]," the school social worker said in that group interview, "with some leadership from the seventh graders. Those two groups are really ripe for that work." Ms. Darby agreed but predicted productive dissonance.

> I think that having the Gentlemen create a code for teachers would be great. I think it's going to disrupt a lot of, it's going to cause a lot of hostility in the staff, but maybe it's what they need for something to change. Or for teachers to be more aware of their own actions and how they affect kids, and their own biases that they don't really pay attention to normally.

Mr. Tyson offered to trial this idea with his team of teachers in the sixth grade, who would be looping up with seventh graders in 2020-2021. The trial appears to have potential as a second phase of the work of this research study, could shift the burden of change from students to adults, and could lead to antiracist, structural reform at North.

As for my own job security, I do not want that to keep me from doing the right thing. Mills (2015) discusses this tension in terms of electoral politics:

> In recent decades, the debate about race within the American left has been torn between two seemingly conflicting imperatives: veracity and electability. One can be "principled" and tell the truth about American white supremacy and the need to address structural racism in our policies and institutions—and be guaranteed the also-ran slot. Or one can downplay race as an issue—by remaining silent, vaguely deferring it, or making putatively "universalist" public policy promises—and then hope, once elected, to smuggle in a progressive, albeit disguised, racial agenda. (p. 43)

But the stakes for me are lower than this, and far lower than for the Gentlemen. And I have plenty of capital to spend. I close with this salient guidance from a White male commentator:

> When I feel afraid, I need to remember… What do I have to be afraid of? As a white man in America, there are practically limitless opportunities for me to mess up, and most likely still be protected from harm. This protection is psychological, financial, and physical. And if I'm not willing to risk the slightest portion of it, than my purported commitment to ending white supremacy is meaningless (Brosbe, 2018, para. 14).

Epilogue

The Gentlemen are at this moment, May, 2020, separated by COVID-19 stay at home orders. They have a twice-weekly Zoom meeting, but it does not replace lunch together, afterschool basketball, and frequent stops at the social worker's office for banter and community. When one teacher surveyed her students online about what they missed while stuck at home, Reegan answered in one word: "Gentlemen."

In contrast, the Code appears to be a distant, foggy memory for them. The community volunteer facilitator, in the group interview, predicted that the process of creating a Code would not be a defining aspect of the boys' experience as Gentlemen. Instead, he told me, creating it would be just another stitch in the bond between them. "It's cool to see them think about their group and themselves," he noted.

> What they're doing is processing the shared vision, you know, so that they can move forward, support each other, and create the experiences they want for each other. So, yeah, I think that they see that they're on this journey together and that it's cool to be a part of.

It remains to be seen, when we eventually return to physical school, if the Code retains any resonance for the Gentlemen. If it doesn't, one of our jobs as adults—while we also turn to think about our group and ourselves in relation to the problem of practice—will be to keep listening for what does resonate for the Gentlemen. Like the school social worker says, "I don't know what a Gentleman is. But they do, and they won't let it be anything it's not."

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Appendix A

Needs Assessment Interview Protocol--Gentlemen

Introduction: Thank you for participating in this interview. If at any time you wish to stop participating, you may. There will be no negative consequences. I will be asking a series of questions to the group. If you want to answer, please do. If you don't, you do not need to. I will be recording what you say and transcribing it later. I will be summarizing and analyzing what the group says in my dissertation, but your names will not be used. Before we begin the discussion, we all need to agree to the importance of keeping information discussed in the discussion confidential. To ensure confidentiality, please verbally agree to keep everything discussed in the room confidential.

Questions:

1. What kind of behavior gets kids into trouble at North?
    a. (Follow-up – Why do you think the teacher or the principal does not like this behavior?)
2. What happens at school when someone gets in trouble?
    a. (Follow-up - How would you change it if you could?)
3. Do you think that certain groups of students get in trouble more than others?
    a. (Follow-up - Why do you think that is the case?)
4. How do you think your experience at school is different from the experience of White students or female students?
    a. (Follow up – Why do you think those differences exist?)

5. Think of a time when you got in trouble here. Why do you think the adult reacted the way they did?
    a. (Follow up – How do you think the adult might have reacted differently with a different student? Why?)
6. When you get in trouble, what kind of consequence do you usually get?
    a. (Follow up – Do you think other students would get different consequences than you? Why?)
7. What could people at this school do to improve how discipline works?

Closing: As we conclude our time together, I want to remind each of us that we should not discuss anything that was said in this interview. Does everyone understand and agree?

Appendix B

Needs Assessment Interview Protocol—Leaders Council

Introduction: Thank you for participating in this interview. If at any time you wish to stop participating, you may. There will be no negative consequences. I will be asking a series of questions to the group. If you want to answer, please do. If you don't, you do not need to. I will be recording what you say and transcribing it later. I will be summarizing and analyzing what the group says in my dissertation, but your names will not be used. Before we begin the discussion, we all need to agree to the importance of keeping information discussed in the discussion confidential. To ensure confidentiality, please verbally agree to keep everything discussed in the room confidential.

Questions:

1. What kind of behavior gets kids into trouble at North?
    a. (Follow-up – What causes these behaviors and why are they problematic to us?)
2. What happens at school when students get in trouble?
    a. (Follow-up - How would you change our disciplinary system if you could?)
3. Black boys receive discipline referrals at a higher rate than other groups in the building. What are some possible explanations for that?
4. How do you think race and gender might impact a student's experience at North?
5. Compare the behavior of White girls at North Middle School to the behavior of Black boys?
    a. (Follow up – Why might those differences exist?)

6. Think of a recent time when a Black boy "got in trouble" here. What was the problem behavior?
    a. (Follow up – Do you think there are any ways in which someone might have reacted differently with a White student or a girl?)
7. Think of a recent consequence assigned to a Black boy. What was it?
    a. (Follow up – Do you think someone might have assigned a White student or a girl a different consequence in the same circumstance? Why?)
8. If we were, as a school, to attempt to decrease the disciplinary involvement of Black boys, how might we go about it?

Closing: As we conclude our time together, I want to remind each of us that we should not discuss anything that was said in this interview. Does everyone understand and agree?

Appendix C

Gentlemen Code Logic Model

Situation: At North Middle School, Black males are disproportionately referred for discipline compared to their peers. One possible factor is cultural difference in behavioral norms between those students and their teachers and administrators, resulting in excessive selection for discipline.

Inputs	Outputs		Outcomes -- Impact		
	Activities	*Participation*	*Short*	*Medium*	*Long*
The Gentlemen's articulation of shared commitments for behavior, to each other, and to issues that matter to them. Facilitation by independent equity consultant. Family and faculty input.	September 2019: The Gentlemen work with an outside equity consultant to draft a Gentlemen's Code. September 2019: The Gentlemen invite parents/guardians and other adult allies to a dinner at school, where guests comment on the draft. October 2019: The Gentlemen finalize the Code and present it to the school community. October 2019-March 2020: Student researcher records and edits 1 to 2 minute videos of Gentlemen reflecting on the Code, distributing video to faculty, Gentlemen, and families for viewing.	The Gentlemen Families and selected teachers of the Gentlemen School Social Worker as group sponsor Facilitators	Articulation of culturally responsive behavioral norms. Recurring reference to the Code by Gentlemen, families, and faculty/staff. Empowerment of Black male students and their families in defining behavioral norms.	Increased cultural-responsiveness of PBIS at North. Stronger positive self-image for the Gentlemen. Stronger positive reputation of the Gentlemen among faculty and staff.	Reduction in disciplinary referrals for the Gentlemen. Institutional sustainability of the Gentlemen. Improved faculty/staff perceptions of Black male behavior.

Assumptions

- One factor in discipline disparities at North is cultural difference leading to differential selection for discipline.
- The Gentlemen are the face of Black males at North.
- A Gentlemen's Code will become part of the culture of the Gentlemen.

External Factors

- Varying home cultures and expectations of school among students, families, staff, and faculty.
- Bias toward Black males.

Appendix D

Summary Matrix

Research Question	Measure	Source	Collection	Analysis
PROCESS EVAL				
PRQ1: How were various stakeholders involved in the process? (QUAN)	Attendance and time spent in each activity.	student researcher	attendance sheet	quantitative description
PRQ2: What qualities of the student-adult collaboration did participants experience as helpful? (QUAL)	Interview questions: *-What was it like to collaborate between students and adults to create the Gentlemen's Code?* *-What worked well about the collaboration?* *-What could have worked better?*	student and staff/faculty participants and student researcher	postintervention group interviews; field notes	directed content analysis using Mitra's (2003, 2009) conditions for success in student-adult collaboration as an *a priori* frame.
PRQ3: In what ways did the intervention process empower Black boys? (QUAL)	Interview questions: *-What do you think of the Gentlemen's Code?* *-Does the Gentlemen's Code reflect your culture and beliefs?* *-How was your voice included in its drafting?* *-How do you think it will change things at North?*	student participants and student researcher	postintervention group interviews; field notes	directed content analysis using Cummins' (2001) framework for the empowerment of minority students as an *a priori* frame.

Research Question	Measure	Source	Collection	Analysis
OUTCOME EVAL				
ORQ1: In what ways does the Gentlemen's Code reflect greater cultural responsiveness than existing behavioral expectations? (QUAL)	document comparison	PBIS documents, Gentlemen's Code, Gentlemen, student researcher	postintervention document review with Gentlemen focus group; field notes	emergent iterative coding/thematic analysis
ORQ2: In what contexts and for what purposes was the Gentlemen's Code referenced by stakeholders during Trimester 2? (QUAL)	Interview questions: *-Describe a time when you heard a student or a teacher mention the Gentlemen's Code. What happened?*	student and staff/faculty participants and student researcher	postintervention group interviews; field notes	iterative coding/thematic analysis
ORQ3: In what ways did Gentlemen self-perception change during the intervention? (QUAL)	Open response survey questions: *-What is the Gentlemen's Group?* *-What are the Gentlemen like?* *-What impact does being part of the group have on members?*	Gentlemen	pre/post survey; postintervention group interviews	iterative coding/thematic analysis
ORQ4: In what ways did faculty/staff perception of the Gentlemen change during the intervention? (QUAL)	Open response survey questions: *-What is the Gentlemen's Group?* *-What are the Gentlemen like?* *-What impact does being part of the group have on members?*	full faculty/staff; adult session participants	pre/post survey; postintervention group interviews	iterative coding/thematic analysis
ORQ5: Did the mean number of discipline referrals per Gentleman differ between trimesters 1 & 2 in 2019-2020 or between trimester 2 2018-2019 and trimester 2 2019-2020? (QUAN)	referrals entered into SWIS database	SWIS data	SWIS database	Related-samples Wilcoxon signed rank test; standardized effect size

Appendix E

Attendance Spreadsheet

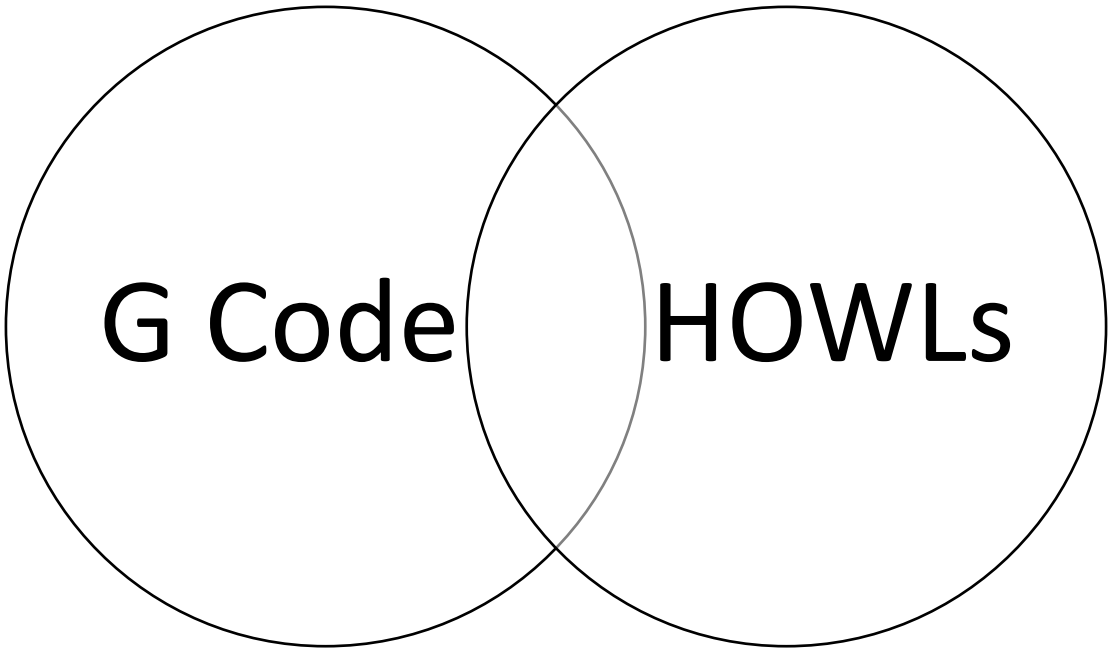
Pseudonym	Participant Type	Race/ethnicity	Gender	Home Language	Time spent in initial drafting session	Time spent in dinner and input session	Time spent in final drafting session	Time spent in presentation to community	Time spent on booster videos

Appendix F

Document Comparison Focus Group Protocol

Directions for facilitation:

1. Show and read to participants North's HOWLs standards and targets.
2. Show and read to participants the Gentlemen's Code.
3. Draw a Venn diagram and ask the Gentlemen to help fill in each of the three sections with words that describe similarities and differences between the documents.



Appendix G

HOWLs

RESPECT

- I actively listen (eyes, ears, mouth).
- I work collaboratively with classmates.
- I use my body safely.
- I communicate politely and kindly.
- I use appropriate school language and tone.
- I treat school property carefully.
- I leave others' property alone.
- I respect people's needs for personal space.

RESPONSIBILITY

- I arrive on time and with all the necessary materials.
- I complete all my homework and classwork.
- I work to meet established deadlines.
- I work to repair any damage done.
- I follow adult directions.
- I stop when asked to stop.
- I am honest about and own my actions.

- I try to understand how my actions impact others.
- I know the learning targets and strive to meet them**.**

PERSEVERANCE

- I keep working until the task is complete.
- I revise my work to make it better.
- I focus on learning.
- I ask specific, relevant questions when needed.
- I try more than one strategy to solve a problem.
- I reflect on my work accurately.
- When things get hard, I try harder.
- I use failure as a chance to learn and improve.
- I miss class time only when truly necessary.

SCORING: 4. I help others do so, too
3. I do independently
2. With reminders I do
1. Even with reminders I still don't yet

Appendix H

Group Interview Protocol

Introduction: Thank you for participating in this interview. If at any time you wish to stop participating, you may. There will be no negative consequences. I will be asking a series of questions to the group. You are welcome to respond to any question or to something another person mentions in his or her response. I will be recording what you say and transcribing it later. Your names will not be used in any summary of the discussion. Before we begin the discussion, we all need to agree to the importance of keeping information discussed confidential. To ensure confidentiality, please verbally agree to keep everything discussed in the room confidential. Facilitator will ask each student to agree to confidentiality.

Questions:

1. What was it like to collaborate between students and adults to create the Gentlemen's Code?
2. What worked well about the collaboration?
3. What could have worked better?
4. What do you think of the Gentlemen's Code? How did this code change through our discussions?
5. Does the Gentlemen's Code reflect your culture and beliefs?
6. How did you help create the Code?
7. How do you think the Code changed things or might change things at North?
8. Describe a time when you heard a student or a teacher mention the Gentlemen's Code. What happened?

Closing: As we conclude our time together, I want to remind each of us that we should not discuss anything that was said in this interview. Does everyone understand and agree?

Appendix I

Survey of Perceptions About the Gentlemen

Introduction: Thank you for participating in this survey. It is part of Mr. Giessman's research on the Gentlemen. By completing this survey, you are consenting to be in this research study. Your participation is voluntary and you can stop at any time.

Directions: Please respond to the following questions with short answers. A single sentence or a few key words is enough.

1) What is the Gentlemen's Group?

2) What are the Gentlemen like?

3) What impact does being part of the group have on its members?

Appendix J

Dinner Invitation

Dear _____,

You are invited to a Gentlemen's Community Dinner!

Sincerely, _____

Come and learn about the Gentlemen

Who: Gentlemen, families, friends
What: Dinner and discussion with the Gentlemen
When: **Thursday, October 3rd, 2019, 5:30-7:30pm**
Where: **XXXXXXXXXXXX**
There is parking directly behind the building, off of XXXXX Street. If you need a ride, let us know.

Questions: XXXXXXX

Appendix K

Initial Drafting Session Protocol

Facilitator Directions:

1) You will lead a 60-minute session with representatives of the Gentlemen. If the group size exceeds 8, split them into shifts, with those not being interviewed playing basketball outside.
2) In the first 20 minutes of the first group, you will ask the Gentlemen to orally brainstorm a list of habits that define a Gentleman, recording them on a whiteboard.
3) In the second 20 minutes, you will show the Gentlemen North's HOWLs standards and targets asking the Gentlemen to comment on similarities and differences between their brainstorm and the HOWLs.
4) In the final 20 minutes, you will ask for any remaining additions to the brainstorm and ask them to put checkmarks next to the three items they feel most strongly about.
5) The next two groups will follow the same protocol, except building upon the existing brainstorm instead of starting from scratch.
6) After the sessions, you will record a draft Code based on the most popular concepts.

Appendix L

Dinner Input Session Protocol

Facilitator Directions:

1) Project the draft code during dinner.
2) As people begin to finish eating, but before they get restless, have selected Gentlemen use the microphone to introduce and read aloud the draft code.
3) Gather guest reactions and input using the following prompts:
    a. Talk at your table for 10 minutes about what you like about this code and what you think is missing.
    b. Can a volunteer from each table take this microphone and share the biggest things you heard at your table?
    c. Is there anything else anybody wants to share about this draft?
4) After the dinner, using help from other participants and observers if necessary, write a concise, bulleted list summarizing key input.

Appendix M

Final Drafting Session Protocol

Facilitator Directions:

1) You will lead a 15 to 30-minute session with groups of 3 to 7 Gentlemen while the other Gentlemen are playing basketball outside.
2) Present the draft Code on the whiteboard and project the bulleted summary of key input from the Dinner Input Session.
3) Ask for suggestions for revision to the draft Code, marking them on the whiteboard.
4) Ask participants to put circles next any revisions they support and x's next to any items they don't support.
5) The next two groups will follow the same protocol, except building upon the existing suggestions for revision instead of starting from scratch.
6) After the sessions, you will record a final Gentlemen's Code based on the most popular suggestions for revision.

Biographical Statement

Jacob A. Giessman was born in Columbia, Missouri. He attended Deep Springs College and earned an A.B. in Philosophy *cum laude* from Harvard University, an M.S. in Environmental Studies from the University of Montana, and an Ed.S. in Educational Leadership from the University of Missouri. He has served as head of school at Academy Hill School in Springfield, Massachusetts; co-director of gifted education in Columbia, Missouri; assistant principal at the site of this research study; and trustee of Deep Springs College in Deep Springs Valley, California.